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INTERPRETING THE INTANGIBLE:
CHALLENGES TO THE DISPLAY OF DANCE OBJECTS IN MUSEUMS

A Thesis

Presented to
the Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Kathryn L. Grossman

March 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes Indigenous and non-Western dance objects in museums, examining the role of theory from material culture studies, critical museology and museum education on approaches to their interpretation and display. To explore this topic, I conducted a comparative analysis of Indigenous and non-Western dance object displays at four museums—Denver Art Museum, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma and the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Norman, Oklahoma—investigating the use of Native voice, reflexive analysis and multisensory elements in the exhibits’ organization, narrative and representational strategies. The research findings indicate that while museums have made great strides in the application of critical museum theory, as evidenced by the broader incorporation of Native voice and reflexive analysis, more needs to be done to reflect the multisensory nature of dance objects in their interpretation and display.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“The stillness of this display belies the life of these pieces, which were made to be worn, heard, and seen in motion” (Gorelick and Termin 2009).

Outside, the jingle dancers take their places within the circular stage created by the bleachers. The sun bears down on them, casting long shadows towards the judges’ table. The dancers remain perfectly still, poised to begin their movement, unsure of what song the drummers will play. When the drum sounds, the dancers begin to move, carefully coordinating their steps so their jingles sound on the downbeat. After a brief period of discord, the jingles and drums play in unison, growing louder as the song goes on. Just as the music crescendos to its climax, it abruptly ceases and the dancers freeze—not one of their jingles makes a sound. Inside, a jingle dress hangs motionless in a museum display. The jingles lie silent, in neat rows on the garment, forever waiting for the drum to begin.

The narrative above illustrates how an American Indian powwow jingle dress is displayed inside and outside the museum environment. Inside the museum, the dress remains motionless and silent, providing the visitor few clues to its multisensory nature. Outside the museum, the dress is an instrument, a vehicle through which the dancer creates music through movement. The difference in the displays is key to visitor

understanding of the object. By viewing the jingle dress in its performed context, the museum visitor can better discover its meaning and purpose.

This thesis examines the interpretation and exhibition of dance objects—objects such as masks, costumes and so forth associated with dance performance. As a dancer, I have often been dismayed at static museum displays of dance objects. I lamented that such dynamic and integral pieces of dance performance were separated from their performed context and exhibited in such a stagnant manner. Most mainstream museums continue to exhibit dance objects “in vitrines, on stands, or on the wall and accompanied by labels, leaflets, or a catalogue” (Baxandall 1991). These conventional representational strategies, however, are insufficient for dance objects, as they are multisensory objects that require multisensory interpretation and display (Dudley 2010; Bouttiaux 2012).

Museums have long been criticized for the ways in which they decontextualize and desensitize objects in their methods of collection care and display. The interpretation and display of non-Western and Indigenous dance objects is an area that has experienced significant growth in multisensory object interpretation and display. Many members of Indigenous communities believe that museum practices of “sensory isolation and enforced stasis are antithetical to Indigenous forms of ritual correctness that may require that objects be fed, held, worn, played, danced, or exposed to air, water, or incense” (Edwards et al. 2006: 20). Due to such critiques, as well as a number of other influences—the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (1990) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Convention for the

Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)—many museums have begun to address the challenges to dance object interpretation and display.

This thesis discusses the role of theory from material culture, critical museology and museum education on museum approaches to the representation of dance objects. To explore this topic, I conducted a comparative analysis of Indigenous and non-Western dance object displays at my four case study institutions—Denver Art Museum, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Norman, Oklahoma. I selected my case study institutions on the basis of their large collections of Indigenous and non-Western objects and because they represented the two main types of museums in which these collections can generally be found—art museums and museums of natural and cultural history.

To explore the role of theory in museum approaches to the representation of Indigenous and non-Western dance objects I investigated the use of Native voice, reflexive analysis and multisensory elements at my case study institutions. To ascertain the extent to which these elements were present in dance object displays at my case study institutions, I analyzed three areas of the exhibitions—exhibit organization, narrative and representational strategies—which critical museologists and constructivist museum theorists identify as key components to exhibit analysis (Kratz 2011; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Monti and Keene 2013).

Museum theorists argue that the presence of Native voice, reflexive analysis and multisensory elements are key to dance object interpretation and exhibition. Roscoe

(1995) and Pheby (2010) claim that the inclusion of the personal dimension of objects is beneficial to visitor understanding of objects, especially objects with a performative dimension, as it reveals far more than mere construction. Perkarik et al. (2014) argue that personal narratives—such as testimonies by Native community members or artists—aid in more meaningful connections between visitors and the objects on display. Clifford (1991) and Price (1989) believe that Native voice helps to promote messages of endurance and continuity in Indigenous and non-Western communities, combatting past museum representations of non-Western and Indigenous culture as static. Native voice is therefore essential to contemporary museum approaches to Indigenous and non-Western art and culture.

Reflexive analysis is an essential component of critical museology, revealing the assumptions and biases that characterize the politics of representation, which Ames (1992 and 1994) and Lindauer (2007) identify as key to the interpretation and display of Indigenous and non-Western objects. Reflexive analysis aids in visitor understanding by acknowledging the shortcomings of past and current displays and communicating to the visitor larger issues of representation that continue to influence museum practice (Vogel 1988; Savage 2008). Therefore, I examined the use of reflexive analysis—on the part of the curator or exhibit developer and reflected in exhibit text—in dance object exhibits.

Constructivist museum theorists argue that the diversification of strategies through the inclusion of multisensory elements is crucial to greater visitor understanding; as it expands the number of learning strategies present in the displays and appeals to a broader base of museum visitors (Hein 1998; Perkarik et al. 2014). The inclusion of

multisensory elements is especially crucial to the display of dance objects as conventional approaches struggle to convey their multisensory and performative nature. Theorists from a variety of disciplines, ranging from material culture studies to performance theorists, agree that the multisensory dimension is key to the meaning of dance objects. The performative nature of such objects—“contributes essentially to what cultural material mean, and therefore affects interpretation of those materials” (Beeman 1993: 370). Performance objects are not effective in and of themselves, however. Mitchell (2006) argues, “Their potency is operationalized—and indeed enhanced through performance” (392). Exploring the use of multisensory analysis in exhibit text and multisensory elements in representational strategies is therefore key in my analysis of dance object interpretation and exhibition.

Two recent exhibits at the National Museum of the American Indian, New York inspired my pursuit of this subject, as they illustrate the influence of recent developments in critical museum theory and demonstrate innovative strategies in the interpretation and exhibition of Indigenous dance objects. The inaugural exhibit for the Diker Pavilion of Native Arts and Cultures, *Beauty Surrounds Us* opened in September of 2006 (Gorelick and Termin 2009). The exhibit featured seventy-seven works from the permanent collection, the vast majority of which were objects with a performative dimension, such as dance regalia, instruments, and so forth (Ibid.). Objects were displayed conventionally, mounted in glass cases, but interpretive text addressed the shortcomings of current display strategies (Ibid.). There were also two interactive computer screens, which allowed visitors to explore the objects on display further (Ibid.).

Circle of Dance, an exhibition dedicated to the display of American Indian dance and dance objects, opened in the Diker Pavilion in October 2012 (Ganteaume 2012). The exhibit features regalia, movement and music from ten distinct American Indian dance styles (Ibid.). Curators arranged mannequins in distinctive poses from each dance style, commissioned a film showing nine of the dances being performed and featured interpretive text dictated from interviews with current American Indian dancers and cultural advisors (C. Ganteaume, Personal Communication 2014). The Diker Pavilion also doubles as a performance space, and biannually the museum invites dancers to perform powwows in the venue (J. Gorelick, Personal Communication 2014).

The two exhibits described above served as inspiration, providing a model for the changes possible to dance object interpretation and display. I was also lucky enough to interview curators Cecile Ganteaume and Johanna Gorelick, who were generous in discussing how they developed strategies to combat common challenges to the display of dance objects. As a result of our conversations, I had a better understanding of the collaboration process that predicates the collection of community narratives as well as the difficulty finding film footage for the dances they selected. Despite the difficulty, Ms. Ganteaume reiterated the importance of both elements in the display of dance objects, as evidenced by the extensive community fieldwork and archival research required to bring *Circle of Dance* to fruition. I learned about the biannual Powwow and Summer Dance programs, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are invited to experience or participate in live dance performance, illuminating the meaning and context of the dance objects in contemporary Native communities. These conversations were helpful in

framing my analysis, revealing some challenges to the incorporation of Native voice and multisensory elements as well as their necessity in dance object exhibitions.

The following is an outline of the structure of the thesis. In Chapter Two, I provide background and relevant literature, illuminating the theoretical framework that informed my research. In Chapter Three, I present my research design and methods, explaining how I constructed my analysis. I present my research findings and analysis in Chapter Four, examining the role of theory on current approaches to dance object interpretation and display by discovering the extent to which Native voice, reflexive analysis and multisensory elements are present. Chapter Five reviews my findings and discusses directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Defying Categorization: The Challenges to Dance Object Display

If the problematic nature of old-fashioned, static dance object displays is so well documented, why their continued prevalence? One reason is the inability of the established museum display framework to accommodate multisensory objects, such as dance objects. As Pheby (2010) states, “the art object for several millennia has tended to be either a two-dimensional representation rendered in pigment, or a three dimensional carving, moulding, or relief” (71). Dance objects defy this categorization, presenting a challenge to conventional interpretive and display strategies.

Another challenge to innovation is that in order to change the approach to dance objects, curators have had to address challenges that had become inherent in museum work. Budgetary constraints and the difficulty of coordinating and compromising with sponsors and board members explain why museums have been traditionally slow to reform (Marstine 2012). Despite the difficulties and delays, museums have made progress in the diversification of their representational displays, providing the visitor with more opportunities to learn about objects in different ways (Hein 1998; Perkarik et al 2014). Gurian (2006) acknowledges this expansion stating, “Object-centered museums now routinely include interpretation in many forms—glossaries, introductions, overviews, films, multimedia kiosks, and extensive labels—in their exhibitions” (49). Expanding the

interpretive framework and encouraging institutional change has paved the way for the revision of dance object displays, but time and money continue to hinder further development.

Another roadblock for the display of dance objects are disagreements on the best way to display dance itself. In 1978, Kaeppler argued that traditional methods of dance display—including notation, diagrams, and photographs—could reveal little of anthropological significance (32). While photographs may provide some additional context, Farnell (2006) states that photographs are both inadequate representations of movement and insufficient for the analytical purposes of ethnography. Buckland (1998) suggests that visual media such as film and video can help assist the scholar in bringing the movement to life for people with no prior knowledge or experience with dance, but multimedia displays and film production take time and money, delaying or limiting their use in museum displays (Marstine 2012; C. Ganteaume Personal Communication 2014).

Another reason current dance object displays generally fail to convey the multisensory dimension of objects to the visitor is because the connection to the performance and performer is absent. Feldman (2006) argues, “...the cultural routine of looking at museum displays separates the body from the object both pragmatically and conceptually” (263). This separation has tangible effects on visitor understanding. As Dudley (2010) argues,

It is in the engagement of the object and the subject, in their very confluence that sensory responses, emotions and ideas are generated...The feelings and thoughts initiated during that interaction, not only have the potential to have an ongoing influence on the subject; they may also affect the fate of the object (8).

Separating subject and object is especially hindering for visitor interpretations of dance objects. For example, in the display of a dance mask, this separation is “particularly crippling because the really powerful and dynamic part—the wearing of the mask—is lost” (Bouttiaux 2012: 36). By omitting the relationship between the dancer and the dance object, most museum displays are excluding information integral to the objects’ meaning—their performed context and multisensory nature.

The challenges to dance object display are further complicated by the lack of venues for focused exhibition of dance objects. The only museum in the United States dedicated to the display of dance, to my knowledge, is the National Museum of Dance in Saratoga Springs, New York. Displays feature costumes or props related to the genre of dance the exhibit is exploring, with interpretive labels describing historical significance or technical elements of movement style. In recent years, film and photography have been increasingly utilized in their displays, but the museum’s associated school is unique in that it provides visitors the opportunity to watch and participate in a class. Access to live performance provides additional tactile engagement with dance and dance objects and aids in greater understanding of the objects’ meaning (Howes 2005; Bouttiaux 2012).

While changing an institution’s approach to dance objects continues to be a challenging process, the benefits for the museum and the visitor have been documented. Alivizatou (2012) discusses how the Horniman Museum in London, England approached the display of performance objects and how curators addressed their multisensory nature. In 2002, the Horniman underwent a massive renovation of their main gallery spaces (Ibid., 135). The new galleries featured “multivocal” exhibits, which Phillips (2003)

defines as exhibits that include multiple perspectives from both source communities and curators to reflexively acknowledge and address past representation and their continued consequences for indigenous communities. The exhibits included multiple media—video projections, installations and interactive screens—situating the objects in their historical and cultural contexts (Alivizatou 2012: 146-7). In addition to their renovation of the gallery spaces, the Horniman offered collaborative programming and live performances alongside their new exhibitions, providing visitors the opportunity to experience the relationship between the tangible and the intangible (Ibid., 152).

The diversity of approaches utilized in the renovated galleries helps visitors understand and engage with the objects on display (Hein 1998; Perkarik et al 2014). In addition, the Horniman staff argues that the museum has become a participatory space, where their community can better engage and interact with the cultures represented in their exhibitions (Alivizatou 2012: 153). Revising displays of dance objects is not only beneficial to visitor understanding of the objects, it is key to making museums more accessible learning environments and creating more appropriate representations of the cultures they exhibit (Ibid.).

New and Critical Museology

Object interpretation and display has been greatly influenced by new and critical museology. The term “new museology” has a variety of origins, but the movement began with an article by Andre Desvallees in Encyclopedia Universalis in 1980 (Davis 2008: 399). In the article he called for radical changes to curatorial practices within the rigid

structure of French museums, encouraging a new generation of curators to reform the old system of museum policy and practice (Ibid.). Nine years later, Vergo (1989) wrote his introductory volume in which he defines new museology as a “state of widespread dissatisfaction with old museology...the old museology...is too much about museum methods and too little about the purpose of museums” (Davis 2008: 399). MacDonald (2006) outlines the problem with old museology stating,

The old was predominantly concerned with “how to” matters of, say, administration, education or conservation; rather than seeking to explore the conceptual foundations and assumptions that established such matters as significant in the first place or that shaped the way in which they were addressed (2).

The new museology movement shifted the focus from objects to people; exploring new techniques for communicating better with visitors and renewing their commitment to community engagement and development (Davis 2008: 400).

By turning the gaze inward, new museology emphasized the importance of reflexive analysis of museums and their practices, as well as reflexive practice in regards to the construction of museum policy. Reflexive practice is a useful tool for museum scholars and professionals in recognizing institutional and disciplinary biases and then communicating them to readers and visitors, helping to combat the stereotypical depictions and representations of the past colonial paradigm (Clifford 1991; Vogel 1988; Kreps 2012). One of the major focuses of museum anthropology is the examination of past colonial influence of museums and considering how museums can evolve to be more democratic and relevant to their communities (Classen and Howes 2006). Museum anthropologists suggest that the purpose of museums is not simply exhibition and

conservation, but a commitment to “liberate dominated peoples from the hegemonic interpretations of others so that they can speak for themselves” (Ames 1994: 105).

Utilizing reflexive analysis, critical museology “problematizes the museum and museum practices, illuminating their Eurocentric, epistemological biases and assumptions” (Kreps 2003: 2). Bennett (1995) argues that museums were created to exercise control over Europe’s citizenry, subtly suggesting to the public that exposure to culture—through museums—was a measure of higher social status and class (19). Museums functioned, and some argue, still function as transformative spaces that mold audiences into ideal, cultured citizens (Edwards et al 2006: 19; Klonk 2009). While the formation of public museums can be interpreted as a democratizing force—allowing all persons access to collections and knowledge—Bennett (1995) argues that museums have succeeded only in enforcing existing social hierarchies, “play[ing] a significant role in differentiating elite from popular social classes” (28).

Critical museologists argue that object interpretation has never been, nor ever shall be a neutral endeavor. Critical museologists argue that exhibitions are the result of “assumptions about the intentions of the objects’ producers, the cultural skills and qualifications of the audience, the claims of authoritativeness made by the exhibition, and judgments of the aesthetic merit or authenticity of the objects or settings exhibited” (Karp 1991: 12). As Baxandall (1991) states, “[A] label does not describe the object. It describes the exhibitor’s thinking about the object, or that part of his thinking he feels it to be his purpose to communicate to the viewer” (38). In order to appropriately analyze an exhibit, one must consider institutional and curatorial motivations and biases in an

attempt to reveal, “what part of any exhibition is the making of the artists and what part is the curator’s interpretation” (Vogel 1991: 191).

Identifying biases and assumptions in museum practice is necessary, as “The ways in which objects are selected, put together, and written or spoken about have political effects” (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 148). Reflexive analysis acknowledges that creators of exhibitions have influence on object value (Gurian 2006). Today, reflexive analysis can aid in the interpretation of objects, investigating the changes in meaning that occur when an object transitions from its original context to the museum context (Fowler and Fowler 1996; Svasek 2007).

Museums reflect political climates and affect social attitudes towards certain groups. Baxandall (1991) argues, “To select and put forward any item for display, as something worth looking at, as interesting, is a statement not only about the object but about the culture it comes from” (34). Historically, the statements museums communicated about Indigenous and non-Western groups were derogatory, with exhibits utilized to demonstrate Western authority over Indigenous and non-Western groups. As Ames (1994) claims, “Anthropology and history museums control Indigenous histories by including in their collections and exhibitions heritage materials they classify as artefacts or specimens...” (104). In contrast, “art museums and galleries control more by excluding, by not collecting or exhibiting indigenous arts except for those that fall within the hegemonic domain of western theory of aesthetics...” (Ibid.). Both of these approaches communicate to visitors that Indigenous and non-Western art is inferior and separate from Western notions of value, reinforcing social and political hierarchies (Price

1989; Lindauer 2007). As a result of more reflexive analysis, museums have adapted their policies and procedures to address issues of cultural restitution, cultural management, and the museum's political role in society (Shelton 2006: 77). Museums are striving to be more accountable to the public, conveying that rather than an omniscient body; museum exhibitions are "a tightly focused lens that shows the visitor a particular point of view" (Vogel 1991: 201).

Indigenous Curation and Traditional Care

In addition to the theory and method supported by new and critical museology, the growing adoption of Indigenous traditional care and curation methods in mainstream museum practice has shaped contemporary approaches to Indigenous and non-Western material culture (Kreps 2003; 2006). Intense scrutiny of issues of representation, particularly transparency and authority in ethnography came to a head in the 1980s, in what became known as the 'crisis in representation' (Shannon 2009: 221). This crisis greatly influenced museum practice, as Brady (2009) explains, "The problematization of the traditional museum has provided the conditions of response, what is understood as reappropriation, decolonization or subversion of the museum form" (135). Lonetree (2012) defines decolonization as the "develop[ment of] a critical consciousness about the cause(s) of [Native] oppression, the distortion of history, our own collaboration, and the degree to which we have internalized colonialist ideas and practices" (25). As a result of these processes, museums began to complicate their narratives and seek out Indigenous perspectives in an effort to decolonize.

A major factor in the growing support for the use of Indigenous curatorial and traditional care practices in the United States is the consultation component of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990), a measure that Lonetree (2012) describes as a “significant achievement for American Indian people...critical in heightening Native involvement in the museum world” (33). As a result of NAGPRA, consultation and collaboration with Native communities has become more frequent in American museums. As Lonetree (2012) states, “It is now commonplace and expected that museum professionals will seek the input of contemporary communities when developing exhibitions focusing on American Indian content” (19). Consultation and collaboration has changed the landscape of museum practice regarding Indigenous and non-Western objects. Increased consultation and collaboration has “changed the way Indigenous history and culture are represented and has redefined our relationship with museums” (Ibid.).

There are several elements that characterize an Indigenous curatorial approach. A major distinction between conventional museum practice and Indigenous models of curation is their treatment of objects. Some museums channel Indigenous curation theory and treat objects as if they are alive, counteracting Western notions of objects as inert (Kreps 2006: 466). At the National Museum of the American Indian, objects are danced, sung, or even deteriorate in accordance with social and cultural stipulations (Coody Cooper 2008: 67). Utilizing methods proposed by Indigenous traditional care and curation theory, museums acknowledge and address the sensory and affective dimensions

of objects by incorporating the multisensory into their interpretation and display. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) states,

“In contrast with conventional exhibitions in museums, which tend to reduce the sensory complexity of events they represent and to offer them up for visual delectation alone, indigenous modes of display, particularly the festival, present an important alternative” (416-17).

Another characteristic of an Indigenous approach is a different view of object ownership, reflecting the requests of certain Indigenous communities. For some Indigenous communities, “objects are also often not considered part of a public trust, as they might be in a mainstream museum, but are owned by families, clans, or religious practitioners” (Kreps 2003: 147-8). This view of ownership can affect public access to collections, as access to certain objects may be restricted based on clan, gender, or sacred nature (Kreps 2006: 464-5). In some cases, objects may also be lent out to the traditional owners for participation in religious or social rituals (Coody-Cooper 2008). By recognizing traditional ownership and allowing their continued use in ritual and custom, Clifford (1991) argues that the museum encourages the visitor to think about contemporary Indigenous culture and the object’s meaning and significance to the culture today (232).

Another aspect of Indigenous curation and care that influences contemporary museum practice is the encouragement of continued connection and relationships between the collection and the community. As Kreps (2003) states,

What becomes clear when looking at how objects are perceived and treated in Indigenous museums is that they are not decontextualized to the degree they are in western museums. Objects remain ensconced in their larger cultural contexts, and in direct relationship to people’s lives as part of ongoing cultural traditions (148).

Continued connection and engagement with source communities reflects a broader shift in museum practice, as Caro (2009) states,

Professionals in the field have re-conceptualized the mission so their institutions—traditionally focused on insular projects centered on protecting and contextualizing precious objects—have become more responsible about attending to their relationship to the various constituents they serve (62).

The strengthening connection between museums and Native communities has resulted in an increase of the use of Native voice in exhibitions, expanding context in Indigenous object interpretation and allowing museums to be more active addressing the contemporary needs of Indigenous societies (Kreps 2006: 468). For example, at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology curators work in tandem with Aboriginal communities in the development and design of their exhibitions (Phillips 2006).

Engaging with Indigenous curatorial practices can aid museums in acknowledging social, political and cultural forces and their affect on collections. Clifford (1991) argues that, in general, exhibits at tribal museums help subvert conventional museum practices,

Acknowledge[ing] of past exclusion from the majority narrative; provid[ing] an overview of colonialism's affects and current struggles in the community; identify[ing] the art/culture distinction as irrelevant; challeng[ing] the idea of a linear and unified history using local, communal history and continue to be use collection items for traditional practices (226).

The practices described above are now increasingly being utilized in the interpretation of Indigenous material culture at non-Indigenous museums (Phillips 2006). Recognizing the value of Indigenous care and curation in the museum realm is important socially and politically. Kreps (2003) argues, "The recognition of indigenous curatorial

practices and museum models is another step toward the decolonization and democratization of museums and museum practices” (4).

The elements described above are part of an Indigenous approach to material culture. The Indigenous approach encourages museums to:

...adhere to a research methodology that includes producing scholarship that serves Native communities; following Indigenous communities’ protocols when conducting research; rigorously interrogating existing scholarship and calling out the ‘anti-Indigenous concept and language’ embedded in existing literature; incorporating Indigenous languages, such as place-names, names of people, and proper nouns; and, finally, privileging Indigenous sources and perspectives over non-Indigenous ones (Lonetree 2012: 25).

In general, exhibits shaped by the Indigenous approach are less focused on objects, preferring to allow concepts developed in consultation with Native communities to shine. As Russell (2012) states, “Objects are still central to the exhibition, but they are selected to illustrate certain themes...Displaying objects in ways that convey both their historic and their contemporary resonances is central in these presentations” (37).

Addressing the contemporary purpose of Indigenous objects necessitates the use of Native voice, as Russell (2012) continues, “The success of museum projects...relies on the insights of Native and non-Native artists, scholars, and curators alike; fruitful approaches include formal analysis, cultural specificity, artist biography, and use of Native voice” (16).

Native voice is defined as more than the simple inclusion of Native perspectives in an exhibit’s narrative. Shannon (2009) describes Native voice at the National Museum of the American Indian as a collaborative process, with curators spending many hours in the field with community members, recording stories for the exhibit narrative and co-

deciding exhibit themes and design. Native voice is essential to contemporary approaches to Indigenous arts. As Caro (2009) states,

...the curation of Native arts is a specialization that requires not only knowledge of curatorial practices but also a commitment to understanding the perspectives of the various cultural groups represented by the works of art...the curation of Native art requires an understanding of the role played within, and outside, the Native communities represented in an exhibition (64).

By engaging in reflexive analysis, consulting and collaborating with Native communities and utilizing the information gathered by these actions in their exhibitions, museums can be agents in the decolonization process. By adopting elements of the Indigenous approach and utilizing them in the display of Native arts, “museums can become a means for repairing colonization’s harm” (Lonetree 2012: 165).

Beauty Surrounds Us and *Circle of Dance*, exhibits at the National Museum of the American Indian, New York described in Chapter One, are good examples of how Indigenous curation and traditional care theory can be applied in the interpretation and display of dance objects. *Beauty Surrounds Us* features discussion about the multisensory dimension of dance objects in topic labels and *Circle of Dance* utilizes exclusively Native Voice in exhibit text. In addition, *Circle of Dance* employs multimedia, active placement and live performance, providing the visitor the opportunity to experience the sensory complexity of the objects on display. These two exhibits serve as case studies for the influence of Indigenous curatorial models and how they can affect change in museum approaches to dance objects.

Anthropological and Art Historical Approaches to Material Culture

This section discusses the progression of approaches to material culture in the fields of anthropology and art history, illuminating how these approaches have influenced museum practice and shaped visitor perceptions of Indigenous and non-Western culture.

The Art/Artifact Distinction

The interpretation and display of dance objects are greatly defined by what anthropologists and art historians have termed the “art/artifact distinction.” Art anthropologists believe that this distinction greatly influences how objects are interpreted and displayed in museums. As Pearce (1993) states, “The way in which we perceive the form of an object...governs the ways in which we understand its relationship to other pieces...” (131). The art/artifact distinction is part of a much larger disagreement about the interpretation and display of objects. Errington (2005) explains the contemporary dilemma in analyzing an art object: “A person who is about to analyze an art object is faced with two obvious and very different alternatives. One is to look inside the frame, so to speak, at line, color, shape and content. The other is to look outside the frame, or even at the frame itself” (221). Deciding whether to interpret and display an object as art or artifact directs the visitor as to value of context in object interpretation and display.

Beginning in the 1870s, art museums began to distinguish art objects from ethnographic objects, curating their collections based solely on their aesthetic value (Hamilton 1985: 37). Ethnographic collections were arranged typologically and geographically to show evolutionary change or an overview of objects from a certain

group (Morphy and Perkins 2006; Svasek 2007). As a result of this process, Clifford (1988) argues that, in general,

“The distinction between the aesthetic and the anthropological [is] institutionally reinforced. In art galleries, non-Western objects are displayed for their formal and aesthetic qualities. In ethnographic museums, they are represented in a ‘cultural context’” (156).

Vogel (1988) believes one of the contributing factors in the difference in art/artifact interpretation and display is a result of collection practices. Art institutions focus on acquiring “masterpieces,” highlighting their individual aesthetic qualities through their display strategies and excluding documentation that could be utilized to contextualize a piece (Hatcher 1999; Vogel 1988). Ethnographic museums, on the other hand, tend to house collections with more extensive documentation. Historically, they have only collected items of similar type, selecting mostly what would be representative of a particular kind of artifact produced by the culture in question (Vogel 1988; Svasek 2007). The types of objects collected—an oil painting or marble sculpture in an art museum versus a spear or ceramic in an ethnographic museum—lend themselves to different interpretation and display strategies, which communicate to the visitor that they are either art or artifact (Price 1989).

Morphy and Perkins (2006) argue that the different approaches employed at art and ethnography museums are one of the factors that resulted in a rift between the disciplines of anthropology and art history. Anthropologists perceived the definition of art as too narrow and Eurocentric in nature and, for the most part, excluded the aesthetic dimension of objects from their analyses (Ibid.). But in the 1960s, with the popularity of exchange discourse and symbolic anthropology, anthropologists began to once again

consider the aesthetic dimension in object studies (Morphy and Perkins 2006). Today, installations in art and ethnographic museums resemble each other more and more, with natural history museums becoming less cluttered and focused on typology and art museums realizing the benefits of anthropological information to understand art (Vogel 1988; Price 1989).

Dance objects can be perceived as either art or artifact, but the necessity of contextual information in their interpretation and display and their prevalence in ethnographic collections has resulted in most dance objects in museums being deemed artifacts. But recent developments influenced by the field of art anthropology—such as the focus of placing art in the context of its producing society—illustrate a merging of approaches that can be seen in the interpretation and display of dance objects. Dance objects are located in both art and ethnographic institutions, making them an intriguing case study for how the art/artifact distinction is manifest in museum approaches to their interpretation and display.

My case study institutions feature a blending of art/artifact approaches to dance objects. The Denver Art Museum utilizes contextual information for many of their Native and non-Western pieces, but prefers an aesthetic, form-focused approach to contemporary Indigenous and non-Western art. While the majority of labels exclude context, the label for Indigenous objects in the *Focus on Favorites* exhibit at the Gilcrease provide a wealth of contextual information. Denver Museum of Nature and Science surrounds their Indigenous objects with contextual information, but some of their exhibits, namely *Insider and Outsiders: Contending Portraits of Native Americans*,

display drawings and paintings utilizing conventional art methods. Sam Noble utilizes contextual environments for their historical collection, but the majority of the ethnology collection is displayed utilizing conventional methods with limited contextual information.

Easing the difference in how art and artifact are interpreted and displayed is important because the separation of art objects and ethnographic objects has served to create a hierarchy of value in the minds of museum visitors (Svasek 2007: 140). The art/artifact distinction has been historically unkind to Indigenous and non-Western art, identifying the majority of it as artifact (Price 1989; Clifford 1988). The display of Indigenous and non-Western art works in ethnographic collections has communicated to visitors that these groups and their culture are static and unchanging (Vogel 1988: 12).

While tension still exists between universalist art and anthropological perspectives, the field of art and anthropology has served to bridge the gap and start valuable discussions about how art and artifacts can be treated in the museum realm (Morphy and Perkins 2006). The interpretation and display of dance objects is a case study for the influence of art anthropology on museum practice as it shows how objects can be viewed in an art institution without the exclusion of contextual information. Westermann (2005) and Phillips (2005) call for a merging of approaches in the analysis of non-Western and Indigenous material culture. Vogel (1988) and Clifford (1988) examine the theoretical assumptions that inform institutional approaches to material culture and what influence they have on visitor perception and understanding of a cultural

group. Art anthropologists are increasingly considering how representational strategies influence visitor perception of the cultures displayed.

Evolutionism

The fields of art history and anthropology emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and were greatly influenced by evolutionary thought (Berlo 2005). As exemplified in Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1887), the evolutionary perspective held that the material culture of a group represented its developmental stage of society—utilizing material culture to classify groups of people. In the art realm, this stage of interpretation was based on universalist theory—a scientific approach that classified groups by complexity of their material culture—which bound aesthetics to race with no consideration of local interpretation (Svasek 2007: 20). The classificatory systems of early museums reflected the evolutionary perspective, arranging objects by type and according to their place on the evolutionary scale; with Indigenous objects defined as primitive and European objects representing civilization (Berlo 2005; Morphy and Perkins 2006).

The reaction to the evolutionary approach had important ramifications in the museum realm. Franz Boas, an American anthropologist and curator at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, challenged evolutionary theory, revolutionizing museum theory and practice (Pierpont 2004). He argued that universal systems and social hierarchy were ineffective at analyzing complex, diverse social and cultural phenomena (Ibid.). In his contributions to the American Museum of Natural

History's annual bulletin, Boas showed how Indigenous artists in Northwest Coast societies juxtapose realism with abstraction, refuting prior evolutionary approaches to artistic development that claimed Indigenous and non-Western peoples were inferior or less evolved (Berlo 2005: 181; Svasek 2007: 24). Boas reorganized the American Indian exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History by tribe instead of type of object and asserted that objects must be displayed in the context of the source culture (Pierpont 2004). Boas' influence predicated the cultural relativist approach to art and material culture, which contradicted the notion of hierarchy in artistic style by arguing for individual, independent progression of culture (Svasek 2007). In regards to museum practice, Boas helped create the "culture area" approach to Indigenous material culture, a movement that rose in popularity in the first half of the twentieth century and continues in many mainstream museums today (Berlo 2005: 185).

Functionalism

While reactions to evolutionary anthropology illuminated the need for reform in material culture study, functionalism restricted object analysis and interpretation. Objects are categorized and interpreted based solely on their utility, material culture was seen as a "passive object of functional use," giving little credit to "individual creativity and intentionality" (Hodder 1994: 51). Culture was viewed as a shared system of thoughts and practices that did not vary within a distinct group of people, assuming uniformity in beliefs and motivations of artists in the same ethnographic group (Svasek 2007: 26). In

addition, most functional analyses claimed that all objects were “products” created for the needs of human society, ignoring any meanings beyond the utilitarian (Hodder 1994: 51).

As fieldwork became the predominant method of anthropological analysis, the role of material culture to the discipline was downgraded (Miller 1994). An additional consideration is that during this time period anthropologists began to transition from museums to universities, thus they were not as engaged with museum collections as they had once been (Reynolds and Stott 1987). This combination of factors led to a diminished focus on material culture. For some time material culture became “subordinate or secondary,” a world in which objects, “...are seen as merely the outcome or the product—or even detritus—of primary thinking, feeling, and acting which is carried out elsewhere” (Pearce 1993: 17). This attitude was reflected in museum displays, which showed the objects as inert and of singular meaning.

Structuralism

Structuralism reconfigured objects as text, illuminating the relation of an object to larger society and culture (Howes 2005). Structuralists claimed that the definition of material culture as ‘artefact,’ “takes a narrow view of what constitutes material objects, concentrating upon that part of their nature which involves the application of human technology to the natural world,” as opposed to studying the wider significance and influence of objects on humanity (Pearce 1994: 11). Structuralism pushed the correlation between material culture and language, a theoretical alignment that would continue for some time.

As Howes (2005) states,

What has been called the linguistic turn—which gained prominence in the 1960s—has dominated much of late twentieth century in the humanities and social sciences. According to this approach, all human thought and endeavor can be understood as structured by, and analogous to, language, so one may best look to linguistics for models of philosophical and social interpretation (1).

Structuralism also reversed the restrictions of analysis placed on material culture research from the functionalist perspective, allowing researchers to examine the relationships between things rather than viewing them in isolation (Miller 2010: 51). Tilley (1994) argues, “In order to understand material we have to think in terms that go entirely beyond it...This means that we are thinking in terms of relationships between things, rather than simply in terms of the things themselves” (70).

Symbolic Anthropology

The symbolic approach argues that objects are “semiotically constructed,” with “multiple meanings attributed to objects by different viewers and users” (Edwards et al 2006: 9-10). Art was viewed as a symbolic process, a way of communicating messages about how people experience the world (Roscoe 1995; Svasek 2007). The idea of art as symbol arose from the integral use of art objects in rituals that anthropologists like Turner (1967) were focusing on during this time period (Morphy and Perkins 2006). In the art field, the symbolic approach was termed signification, which argued that art’s meaning was not fixed and that objects could be interpreted in many different ways by different individuals in changing socio-historical contexts (Svasek 2007: 47).

The symbolic approach helped illuminate problematic aspects of interpretation, specifically the need to include perspectives from the represented communities (Svasek 2007). It also helped with the creation of reflexive practice, as anthropologists began to question their own objectivity (Turner 1986). Ethnographic studies began to be viewed as subjective and incomplete, interpretations based on one's culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 387). Starting with symbolic theory, anthropologists began to emphasize the performative, multivocal nature of ethnographic objects, informed by greater consultation with source communities and a focus on the expressive dimension of objects (McCracken 1987: 103).

Object as Commodity: Object Biographies

While evolutionary anthropology and functionalism focused on an object's composition, the view of objects as commodities highlighted the larger social, economic, and cultural issues surrounding objects. This approach emphasizes the importance of context in the analysis of material culture, as a material anthropologist can no longer "effectively examine an artifact in isolation from its cultural niche, from its material system" (Reynolds 1987b: 184). According to this model, objects have histories of their own, "biographies" that establish an object as "a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories" (Kopytoff 1986: 68). In art historical analysis, an object's 'biography,' is defined as its 'social history' and the historical process approach focused

on the historical and social context of the artwork by examining the wider influences on the artist and artwork beyond its style and form (Svasek 2007: 41).

The biographical approach helped to reverse the idea that objects were passive products of human action. As Appadurai (1986) states, "...the powerful contemporary tendency is to regard the world of things as inert and mute...things have not been so divorced from the capacity of persons to act and the power of words to communicate" (4). This approach highlights the agency of objects and shows how material culture study is important in the exploration of wider social, cultural, and economic phenomenon (Morphy and Perkins 2006). Art is identified as productive and reflective of society, continually being utilized to reinforce or challenge power structures (Svasek 2007: 42-3). Object as commodity theory helped level the playing field for non-Western and Indigenous art objects, as Errington (2005) claims that the examination and analysis of larger systems such as tourism and the art market helped replace older rhetorics of authenticity and primitivism in discussions of non-Western and Indigenous art.

In museums, the biography of objects is defined as "the study of what happens to objects, and to the people they attract, once they leave the hands of the original users and most particularly, once they become appropriated by scholars, collectors and museums in wealthier nations" (Ames 1992: 46). The meaning of an object is dependent on its context; therefore the meaning of an object must be examined before and after its acquisition by a museum (Cameron 2004; Svasek 2007). As Edwards et al. (2006) state, "In a biographical model, objects cannot be understood in terms of a single, unchanging identity, but rather by tracing the succession of meanings attached to them as they move

across space and time” (13). The meaning of an object can change as it transitions into the museum environment, thus the larger social and cultural system of the object are necessary for its appropriate interpretation and display (Svasek 2007).

Discourse Theory

Foucault (1969) argued that discourses are utilized to discipline, supervise and shape individuals and society. Anthropologists and art historians utilize discourse theory to examine the influence of different stages of art interpretation and exhibition on the perception of certain groups (Svasek 2007: 45). For example, colonialism greatly shaped early Indigenous and non-Western object interpretation (Ibid.). Exhibitions were used to “confirm Western representations of non-Western cultures and serv[e] as a springboard for the Western imagination” (Classen and Howes 2006: 203). Colonial representations of American Indian material culture labeled it as “primitive,” a title deemed “ambiguous,” “derogatory,” and “unfortunate” by later scholars (Douglas and d’Harnoncourt 2003: 264). Museums labeled the majority of non-Western and Indigenous objects as ‘craft,’ demoting their value and distinguishing them from the highly favored visual arts in the Western realm (Classen and Howes 2006: 208). Vogel (1988), Price (1989) and Bouttiaux (2012) argue that this hierarchy is still evident in museum displays, continuing to communicate to museum visitors that Indigenous and non-Western art are inferior and static.

Contemporary interpretation and display of Indigenous and non-Western art has also been greatly affected by post-colonial theory. Berlo and Phillips (1998) argue that

post-colonial interpretation of contemporary Native art challenges linear, chronological time and encourages narratives of the endurance and continuity of American Indian culture (3). Exhibits influenced by post-colonial theory also differ in their treatment of appropriation. Prior to post-colonial influence, art historians were fond of the narrative of Modernist masters appropriating “primitive” motifs (Berlo and Phillips 1998: 210). Post-colonial interpretation depicts the process of appropriation and exchange as a much more fluid, two-way exchange of ideas (Ibid.). Another fixture of post-colonial interpretation is the re-evaluation of stereotypes and the assertion of hybrid identity by artists and curators (Majkowski 2010). Post-colonial theory has influenced the subjects Native artists discuss and the content of interpretive materials, as they must address the stereotypes versus the reality of contemporary Native culture (Ibid., 123).

The inclusion of narratives from source communities has become an important fixture in post-colonial museum practice. Including Native voice in exhibit texts can impart important knowledge about objects and their context to museum staff and visitors, helping shift the power of representation back to Native communities (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006: 158). Nancy Mithlo states, “By shifting the locus of the analysis from the psychology of the oppressor to the experiences of the oppressed, a discursive space is made available in which new paradigms of knowledge may become accessible” (quoted in Palmer 2008: 186). Many museums initially resisted the inclusion of Indigenous narratives. But as a result of the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (1990) and mandated consultations, museums have adopted the inclusion of

Indigenous voices in museum interpretation and display of American Indian material culture (Cobb 2005: 364).

Another key method for shifting agency from the exhibitor to the exhibited is the identification of individual artists. In most museum collections of non-Western and Indigenous art, the artist's name is excluded (Price 1989). Clifford (1988) argues the identification of the artist is key to shifting agency and communicating to visitors that these groups are continuous and not static. Recognizing individual and cultural ownership is also important as it contradicts stereotypes of Indigenous culture as ancient or extinct and identifies specific artists or culture bearers who preserve and maintain artistic traditions within contemporary tribal communities (Clifford 1991; Price 1989).

Post-modern or critical museum theory and method has also influenced the interpretation and display of Indigenous and non-Western art. Post-modernism has encouraged the critical examination of museums and their practice (Berlo 2005). The critique of museum interpretation of American Indian culture is illustrated by James Luna's work, *The Artifact Piece* (1987). Laid out in a case, nude except for a breechcloth, Luna displayed his body as a scientific specimen, critiquing the way anthropologists and museums have depicted Native culture (Evans 2010). Richard West, founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian claims, "*The Artifact Piece* dramatically and forever changed the relationship between Indians and those who visit, study, patronize and in other ways interact with Native peoples" (Ibid. 66). Informed by this piece and influenced by post-modern theory, anthropologists and art

historians began to acknowledge and critique museum authority, examining how museum practices can effect the populations they represent.

Postmodern theory was crucial to the development of reflexive analysis and practice, which encourages systems of legitimization (universities, museums, etc.) to analyze their own biases in their approach to art and culture (Pearce 1993; MacDonald 2006). Postmodern analysis recognizes and criticizes systems of legitimization and authority, bringing these issues to the viewer's attention so that they might "feel a degree of responsibility for their role as viewers and constructors of historical memory thorough their uncritical consumption of museum practices" (Evans 2010: 67-8). Reflexive analysis has been key in the reform of interpretive and display strategies in museums and in scholarly approaches to art works (Svasek 2007). Reflexive analysis is also a fixture of anthropological studies as well. In postmodern works, the author acknowledges his or her role in the collection of data and interpretation and includes multiple accounts and perspectives from the community in which they study (Pieterse 2005).

Anthropology of the Senses

The anthropology of the senses emerged in reaction to the excesses of 'textualism' and 'ocularcentrism' in material science accounts, advocating for a more sensual exploration of the human condition (Classen and Howes 2006: 199). Investigating objects utilizing the sensory approach entails an examination of how "Objects are organized and analyzed such that they form relationships and understandings that could be termed culture" (Edwards et al 2006: 12). In order to

identify these relationships and understandings, anthropologists who utilize a sensory approach to material culture emphasize the “intangible social and cultural context” of object meaning (Reynolds 1987a: 1). Material culture studies have become “about not solely meaning nor simply physical form, but the dynamic interaction between both with our sensory experiences” (Dudley 2010: 8). As Svasek (2007) states, in art anthropological analysis, “sensorial engagement between subject and object are now very important” (58).

Prior to the sensorial approach, vision dominated cultural and aesthetic discourse as it was considered “the only appropriate sense of aesthetic appreciation for ‘civilized’ adults” (Classen and Howes 2006: 207). Indigenous and non-Western populations, and their ethnographic objects, were thus transformed in the museum environment to reflect Western cultural values (Price 1989; Vogel 1988). Howes (2003) discusses how the senses are typically ordered in hierarchies, with the dominant group in society linking themselves to the esteemed senses (vision) and reserving the less-valued senses for subordinate populations (everything else) (52). The anthropology of the senses helped combat the view of non-visual senses as savage, advocating for a more multisensory analysis of all material culture (Howes 2005: 3).

The sensory approach to material culture is important because the meanings of some objects cannot be conveyed without appropriate context. Gurian (2006) gives the excellent example of a bowl from Auschwitz, which has no other distinctive qualities that allude to its larger meaning. Another category of objects where the sensory approach is useful is in the interpretation and display of “contact points”—a category of objects that

results from physical contact with the body (Feldman 2006: 245). He claims that contact points are generally excluded or ignored in museum interpretation, as there are no current strategies for displaying them (Ibid.). He encourages theorists to talk about sensory deprivation in museums and work to make the visitor aware of the drawbacks of current display strategies (Ibid., 247). As objects that fit into both Gurian (2006) and Feldman's (2006) categories, dance objects require an acknowledgement and inclusion of the sensory in their interpretation and display.

The sensory turn has influenced approaches to object interpretation and museum education. To maintain visitor interest, museum scholars advise that an exhibit be interactive and engaging (Witcomb 2006; Monti and Keene 2013). Material culture and constructivist museum theorists argue that in order to understand an object, the visitor must engage with it (Howes 2005; Stevenson 2010). Feldman (2006) argues that most museum displays prevent the necessary engagement by creating a "pragmatic and conceptual" rift between the visitor and displays. Interactive displays help address the separation between viewer and object and engage the visitor, which Wright (2010), Stevenson (2010) and Monti and Keene (2013) claim leads to more complex and reflective interpretations by the visitor. Drewal (2012) reiterates the importance of interactive elements to visitor understanding of dance objects, stating, "Only an interactive sensorial experience can achieve the kind of engagement with transformative potential" (55).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

It is written, in the passionately held conviction, that in museums, as in everything else, theory and practice are indistinguishable. Every time we make a museum decision, we are carrying out a philosophical act, which arises from a cultural context and has cultural implications and the more we understand about this, the better for all concerned (Pearce 1993: 11).

The quote above summarizes contemporary museum scholarship. Theory and method are intertwined and it is the job of the museum ethnographer to discover how theory is enacted in museum practice. In Ames' (1992) book, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*, he called museum scholars to action, urging them to utilize reflexive practice and analyze their own environment, performing ethnographies on museums (Ibid., 44). In contemporary museum analysis, institutions have become "cultural artifacts in themselves...located in specific social, political, economic, and historical contexts" (Kreps 2003: 5). In keeping with this approach, this thesis employs anthropological methods such as participant observation, comparative analysis and interviews to analyze displays of dance objects in four museums.

Research Design

This project is a comparative study of dance object displays at four museums—Denver Art Museum, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma and the Sam Noble Museum of

Natural History in Norman, Oklahoma. As Lecompte and Schesul (2010) suggest, a comparative study allows the researcher to explore each institution and its approach to elucidate the similarities and differences. The use of comparison is also identified as a method of anthropology and museum ethnography (Kreps 2003). This project was of qualitative design, utilizing case studies to explore current strategies for dance object interpretation and display and the influence of theory from the disciplines of material culture, critical museology and museum education on those approaches.

Several questions guided my research:

1. Do current strategies for dance object interpretation and display acknowledge the objects' multisensory nature? To what extent are multisensory elements present in dance object display?
2. What role has critical theory played in current approaches to dance object display? Are Native voice and reflexive analysis evident in approaches to Indigenous and non-Western dance object exhibition?

To address these questions I analyzed twenty-two dance object displays at four case study institutions. In selecting my case studies, I chose two institutions that identify as art museums and two that are classified as natural history museums. The selection of these institutions was an attempt to provide a limited comparison of how these two types of institutions approach the display of dance objects. The museums I selected have large ethnographic collections featuring Indigenous or non-Western objects. Based on my

initial survey of museums in my area, I discovered that dance object displays were most prevalent at the institutions with large Indigenous or non-Western collections.

In addition, my decision to focus on Indigenous and non-Western objects was based on my observation that these displays exhibit with greater frequency the elements I have identified as a reflection of theory from material culture, museology and museum education—Native voice, reflexive analysis and multisensory elements. Westermann (2005) also notes that collections featuring Indigenous or non-Western art and objects most often align with ethnographic practices, so I felt these collections would lend themselves well to an anthropological approach, regardless of the type of institution.

I examined the dance object displays at Denver area museums while in residence from September 2012 to August 2014. I participated in an internship with Denver Art Museum's Native Arts department in the summer of 2013, thus I am familiar with the collection and what approaches are taken in regards to its display. To elucidate the influences behind the department's approach, I conducted an interview in February 2014 with John Lukavic, Associate Curator of Native Arts. The interview with Dr. Lukavic was in person and audio-recorded. Before the interview he was provided with an overview of my research and what role the interview would play in my analysis, and verbal consent was obtained. Interview questions addressed current display strategies utilized in the display of dance objects and what influences their approach. The interview was semi-structured, addressing the topics listed above, but open to reflections and observations by the interviewee.

I observed Denver Museum of Nature and Science's approach to dance object display over the course of my two-year residency in Denver. I did not conduct interviews with curators, but I did tour the museum with Steve Holen, Curator of Archaeology, in the fall of 2012, as well as attend a lecture with curator of anthropology Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh in the spring of 2014, where he discussed the role of consultation and repatriation in their approach to American Indian material culture. I also utilized secondary sources, primarily peer-reviewed articles, to get information on the acquisition of the collection and the design of the exhibition. After moving to Oklahoma in the fall of 2014, I explored options to supplement my analysis of dance object displays at the Denver museums. I conducted my observations from February to May 2015, selecting institutions with large ethnographic collections primarily focused on American Indian material culture.

The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma is described as "world's largest, most comprehensive collection of art and artifacts of the American West" (Gilcrease 2015). The museum is also well known for its "unparalleled collection of Native American art and artifacts, as well as historical manuscripts, documents and maps" (Ibid.). The focus of my analysis of the Gilcrease was therefore the Native American art galleries, although I found several other displays of non-Western dance objects that feature in my analysis of the museum's approach.

The final museum I selected is the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Norman, Oklahoma. The focus of my analysis was the *Hall of People of Oklahoma*, where the museum's extensive collection of archaeological and ethnological objects from

American Indian communities is displayed. The website lists its purpose as “tracing the 30,000 year history of Native peoples in the state,” but the exhibit also includes objects from the museum’s ethnology collection, showing the “Native American experience in Oklahoma in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries...that represent ceremonial and everyday traditional activities of the western tribes” (Sam Noble 2015). It was in this part of the exhibit, entitled, “Today, Tribes of Oklahoma,” that I focused my analysis.

Methods for Exhibition Analysis

For my analysis I examine three areas of museum display—exhibit organization and layout, narrative and representational strategies. Museum theorists identify these three areas as key in the determination of curatorial motivations as well as the messages exhibits communicate to visitors (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Kratz 2011). An examination of these elements revealed the role of critical theory from material culture, critical museology and museum education on dance object display by discovering the extent to which the elements of Native voice, reflexive analysis and multisensory elements were present in dance object displays at these institutions.

Exhibit Organization and Layout

Exhibit design influences visitor experience. Pels et al. (2002) argue, “Space must not be reified as a natural, pre-existing container of the social and the material, but it itself a performance” (12). Visitor behavior is “cued by expectations, which are determined by the frame,” or space in which the objects are displayed (Miller 2010: 49).

Pels et al. (2002) argue that exhibit spaces influence visitors by constraining their movements and suggesting particular encounters with art works. Exhibition spaces are also crucially important to object interpretation because, “The meanings of objects are constructed from the position from which they are viewed” (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 103). Westermann (2005) concurs, “How a museum object is experienced depends greatly on its institutional setting” (xiv).

Monti and Keene’s (2013) study claims, “the broad design strategy and visual effect of an exhibition are just as important or more important than individual physical characteristics of the objects” (264). They argue that spatial configuration is a powerful influence on visitor attraction to displays—for example, objects exhibited in isolation or in key positions within the visitor’s line of sight are likely to attract more visitor attention (Ibid., 244). Kratz (2011) discusses that the power of the exhibit environment, particularly how light and color, “frame” the objects and determine how a visitor interprets them. Exhibit organization can also facilitate more meaningful learning experiences. Hein (1998) discusses how exhibit orientation is key to better visitor understanding of the objects as it allows visitors time to get accustomed to the exhibit environment and space to reflect on what they have experienced (151). Exhibits are “spaces of experience,” examining their organization and layout is a key component of exhibit analysis (Klonk 2009).

At my case study institutions, exhibit organization and layout contributed greatly to my discussion of consultation and collaboration with Native communities. At the Denver Art Museum, the 2010 renovation of the American Indian galleries was

accomplished with input from Native advisors (Hill 2000). The locations of the African, Oceanic and American Indian galleries at the Denver Art Museum were also useful in my discussion of curatorial motivations and changes to Indigenous and non-Western displays. Organization was also important to my analysis of the Gilcrease and Sam Noble museums, where design choices greatly influenced the interpretations visitors could extrapolate from the dance object displays. The orientation of the galleries at Denver Museum of Nature and Science were less significant, but a discussion of overall design allowed me the opportunity to address some of the complications of conventional natural history museum approaches.

Exhibit Narrative

Hein (1998) argues that an examination of museum and exhibit narratives is necessary for a complete evaluation of an exhibit. As Svasek (2007) notes, “exhibitions are never just ‘neutral’ spatial arrangements, because facilitators of object display are inevitably involved in representational politics” (123). In order to properly analyze exhibits, the museum ethnographer must recognize that “Museums are themselves complex organizations that attribute symbolism and meaning to things and use them in their own contexts, framing them to exhibit the meanings they select or attribute to them” (Karp and Kratz 2014: 58).

Museum anthropologists look at display narratives because they believe exhibits have social and political power (Lindauer 2007). Heatherington (2010) states that in museum galleries, “The boundaries [between culture and politics] are never finally

drawn...they are always in play” (116). The social and political power of museums is of particular concern to Indigenous and non-Western cultural groups. In the past, museums have utilized methods that presented Indigenous and non-Western culture as static and inferior (Fowler and Fowler 1996; Classen and Howes 2006). To combat this history, critical museologists encourage the reduction of authoritative voice in favor of Native perspectives and the use of reflexive practice on the part of museums to investigate their own collections and displays (Lindauer 2007; Bouttiaux 2012).

Utilizing reflexive analysis in the representation of Indigenous and non-Western culture is evidence of the influence of critical theory on museum practice. As Pieterse (2005) argues, “A growing degree of reflexivity about [representation] may be what has been gained in the shift from colonial to postcolonial times, and this implies a shift from discourse about others to discourse about othering” (178). Reflexive analysis is useful in dance object interpretation and display as it recognizes the continued effects of representational issues such as the art/artifact distinction, authenticity, the influence of tourism and the art market, etc., which Savage (2008) and Bouttiaux (2012) argue needs to be addressed in dance object displays.

In addition to their use of reflexive analysis, I explore the use of Native voice or personal narratives in dance object interpretive text. Drewal (2012) argues that including narratives from Mami Wata practitioners and dancers was a priority for communicating the meaning of the artistic tradition to museum visitors. Price (1989) argues that the inclusion of Native voice helps counter the authoritative voice of curators. As Clifford (1991) states, through the inclusion of Native voice, “Master narratives of cultural

disappearance and salvage could be replaced by stories of revival, remembrance, and struggle” (214). Working with source communities also helps facilitate reflexive practice and analysis of museums as it helps museum professionals and scholars “realiz[e] the political nature of museums, their histories, and their functions, as well as the need to acknowledge and address these dynamics when creating new relationships” (Peers and Brown 2003: 9).

The exhibit narratives at my case study institutions were integral to my analysis of the influence of new museum theory on dance object display. At Denver Art Museum, dance object labels in the African and American Indian galleries introduced broader issues of object interpretation such as authenticity, clan ownership and conservation concerns. My comparison of narratives in the display of Mexican masks at the Gilcrease helped illuminate the importance of context in the exhibition of dance objects. An empty mount inside a case at Denver Museum of Nature and Science and its corresponding label discuss the influence of repatriation on contemporary museum practice. The introductory narrative of Sam Noble’s Hall of the People of Oklahoma proved crucial to discovering the collaborative nature of the exhibit, as did the labels for the dance regalia that acknowledged individual owners and the continued progression of styles and materials. Identifying the individual artist or cultural owner of the objects is key to combatting authoritative voice and returning agency to groups historically misrepresented in museums (Clifford 1991; Errington 2005).

Representational Strategies

The final component to my analysis is the use of multisensory elements in current dance object displays. Perkarik et al. (2014) state that “somatic sensation including movement, touch, sound, taste, light, and smell,” are most often absent in current museum offerings (6). Monti and Keene (2013) claim that exhibits that include multisensory and multimedia displays are more successful at attracting and maintaining visitor attention. For dance objects, multisensory elements provide museum visitors with the performed context of the object on display, a dimension crucial to an understanding of the object’s meaning (Beeman 1993; Mitchell 2006).

Three studies address dance objects directly, discussing how best to adapt their display to include the multisensory dimension. Bouttiaux (2012) examines displays of African masquerade masks, concluding that while complete “transposition”—the transmission of a complete experience—can never take place, dancer narratives and film do make dance object displays more palatable (38). Drewal (2012) utilized film to supplement conventional clothing display in his exhibit, *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas*, displaying full masquerade regalia on platforms flanked by video monitors showing them in their performed context (49-51). Savage (2008) believes that none of these strategies will be successful at conveying the multisensory and performative nature of dance objects in the museum environment (77). She argues that instead museum scholars should focus on commentary related to larger museum issues, such as authenticity or collaboration (Ibid., 79). My analysis explores all of the strategies described above, especially Savage’s (2008) plea to explore larger issues,

but I continue to focus on the use of multimedia and multisensory elements, as museum scholars (Perkarik et al 2014; Monti and Keene 2013) and curators (Bouttiaux 2012; Drewal 2012) continue to identify them as necessary to dance object interpretation and display.

Research Limitations

In this section, I recognize and acknowledge the limitations of my research and analysis. My fieldwork is limited to observations of dance object displays at my four case study institutions. This limits the scope of my inquiry, making it difficult to generalize my findings, but I feel the location of the museums in different states as well as their different institutional inclinations and associations creates an interesting comparison and shows a variety of approaches to dance object display. Although secondary sources and my interviews with curators at two institutions—Denver Art Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian, New York—were illuminating, I wish I could have interviewed museum staff at each of my case study institutions. To provide some insight into curatorial motivations, I refer to museum websites or articles by museum scholars addressing specific galleries or exhibits.

Anthropological approaches to exhibit analysis are generally two-pronged, with an analysis of the narrative and representational strategies employed in exhibitions and visitor evaluation in the form of interviews or surveys (Hein 1998; Monti and Keene 2013; Perkarik et al. 2014). While future research could address the affect of dance object displays on visitor understanding, visitor evaluation was not a part of my research design and I did not have Institutional Review Board clearance to interview or survey

museum visitors. Rather, this project focuses on the strategies employed in the representation of dance objects in museums and their alignment with critical theory, an investigation that does not necessitate visitor evaluation.

Additionally, I acknowledge that the study of dance objects is often approached from the perspective of dance ethnology or anthropology, a discipline that informed my theoretical framework but too greatly expanded the scope of research into the realms of performance theory and intangible cultural heritage. It was therefore my decision to focus on museum representation of dance objects rather than a broader discussion of the exhibition of dance. I briefly discuss some perspectives of dance ethnologists in the section, “The Challenges to Dance Object Display” in Chapter Two, but the focus of my analysis is the strategies museums employ in the interpretation and display of tangible Indigenous and non-Western dance objects rather than intangible dance performance.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Denver Art Museum

Four areas of display are devoted to dance objects at the Denver Art Museum. Two are located in the Daniel Yohannes Family African Gallery and the Joan & George Anderman Gallery of Oceanic Art, and three are located in the American Indian galleries. The African and Oceanic collections are on the third and fourth floor of the sleekly modern Hamilton building. On the third floor, in a narrow, semi-circular area behind the Modern and Contemporary Galleries, several dance masks from Papua New Guinea are on display.



Figure 1 (left)–Eharo Mask, Papua New Guinea artist, Early 1900s, Bark, fiber, paint, and wood, By exchange with the Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia, 1950.562

Figure 2 (center)–Jipae Mask, Arkampinoko, Asmat Region, Papuan Province, Indonesia, Mid 1980s, Bark, fiber, wood, paint, shell, and feather, Gift of the Crandall Family, 2014.116

Figure 3 (right)–Dance Mask, Baining Artist, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, 1900s, Bark, cane, and paint, Purchased with funds from Robert Houston and United Bank, 1988.36

Two masks, Eharo (Figure 1) and Baining (Figure 3), are displayed in glass cases, one, Japae (Figure 2), is mounted on a mannequin with its attached bark shift. All three masks have basic identification labels that provide the type of object, date, material composition, and accession information. Each mask also has an individual caption label that includes contextual information—purpose and function to society, construction techniques and so forth. The caption label for the Baining mask case also shows a color photograph of the masks being worn by dancers during ceremony, with the photo credit dating to the early 1980s. The Eharo and Baining caption labels are written in the past tense with their basic information labels dating both masks to the early 1900s. The Jipae mask label is written in present tense, its basic information label shows that the object was collected in the mid 1980s.

In the center of the African galleries, tucked into one of the many tight, diagonal corners of the Hamilton building, is the display of an Egungun mask.



Figure 4 (left)—Egungun Mask, Unknown Yoruba Artist, Nigeria, 1950s, Wood, paint, and cloth, Partial Museum purchase and partial gift of Michael and Patricia Coronel, 1997.154

Figure 5 (right)—Works from the permanent collection of the Daniel Yohannes Family African Gallery, Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department

The mask (Figure 4), along with its complementary regalia, is attached to a mannequin that slowly rotates. The mask is displayed on a raised platform, painted a neutral shade of beige, contrasting with the deep colors of the mask. The mask's mannequin is oriented in the back right corner of the display and a label with information regarding the mask's materials, geographic origin and date is placed in front of it. There are four other dance masks that accompany the Egungun display. Each is mounted on to a brass t-shaped mount with a painted metal base that matches the platform. These masks have only basic identification labels. On the back wall, an introductory label describes the context of the Egungun mask and the construction of the display. It describes the composition of the Egungun mask display as "A mannequin with shoulders supports the weight of the fabric as it spins, and a framework holds the material outward to enhance the effect." Two pictures of the mannequin's support structure are included at the bottom of the label.

A rectangular-shaped interactive educational activity (Figures 6 and 7) invites the visitor to select instrumental music to play in the space.



Figure 6 (left)—“Sounds of Instruments” detail of Interactive Educational Activity, Daniel Yohannes Family African Gallery, Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department

Figure 7 (right)—image of same Interactive Educational Activity, in its entirety

The instructions read, “Musicians play instruments to inspire masked dancers at African festivals called masquerades. Place a beanbag on the red square to select music for the display.” Visitors are invited to choose from five small beanbags with pictures of different instruments printed on them and place them on a sensor to hear a certain instrument. The selected music plays throughout the space, accompanying the mannequin’s motion. In the southern corner of the African collection’s gallery space there is a bank of chairs with room for four people with the vinyl text, “Experience African Art with Music” above it. Each seat has an iPod and headphones with a variety of African music selections to choose from. From the chairs visitors can sit and look back at the African collections, or gaze at the steeply angled white wall in front of them.

The first dance object display located in the American Indian galleries is on the second floor of the seven-story North building. The American Indian galleries are located on two levels—the second and third floors of the building. The lower level is generally reserved for the museum’s collection of Northwest Coast objects, as the high ceilings aid in the display of tall items such as totem poles. On the lower level, the museum displays its collection of Northwest Coast dance masks. One large mask is placed on a hexagonal platform (Figure 8) with two-dozen different mask types mounted to the walls behind it (Figure 9).



Figure 8 (left)—Four-faced Hamat'sa Mask, George Walkus, Kwakwaka'wakw, about 1938, Wood, paint, cedar bark, and string, Native Arts acquisition fund, 1948.229

Figure 9 (right)—Group of Northwest Coast masks and interpretive video from the permanent collection, American Indian galleries, Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department

The mask displays feature individual basic information labels and two topic labels. The topic labels highlight specific customs that relate to the mask's purpose in Northwest Coast society. The first label, located on the wall behind the large mask and to the right of the hung masks is titled, "Potlatch and Privilege." The label explains the role of masks in Northwest Coast potlatches and describes the masks on the wall as a survey of different mask types from a variety of different tribal groups. It concludes with the statement, "Some feature clan symbols while others were made for specific ceremonies, fashioned as portraits, or created for the contemporary art market."

On the platform, a Hamat'sa mask of the Kwakwaka'wakw dancing society is displayed (Figure 8). Next to the mask is a topic label titled, "Magic by the Firelight." The label explains the origin of the mask and its purpose in an initiation ceremony. It describes the mask's illusionary purposes, pointing out the concealed strings that allow the mask to open and close at the dancer's command. The label concludes with a request

for visitors, inviting them to “Imagine the sound and movement as masked dancers pull the concealed strings to operate the clapping beaks while the glossy black and white colors catch the firelight.”

Behind the platform, affixed to the wall is a small television screen that plays a short, looped video. The video shows the masks being danced and close-ups of the Hamat’sa mask on the platform to highlight its important features. The definitions of “mask,” “context” and “Kwakuitl” are featured in the short film. The director, dancers and date of the film are not provided, but based on dancer attire and the depicted ceremony’s surroundings I would estimate late 1980s or 1990s. To the right of the film there is a reading station with two chairs and a table with several books on Native Northwest Coast culture.

One of the masks (Figure 10) mounted to the wall has a unique identification label. In addition to information about the type, date and material composition of the mask, there is a short paragraph detailing its use in a specific ritual (Figure 11).

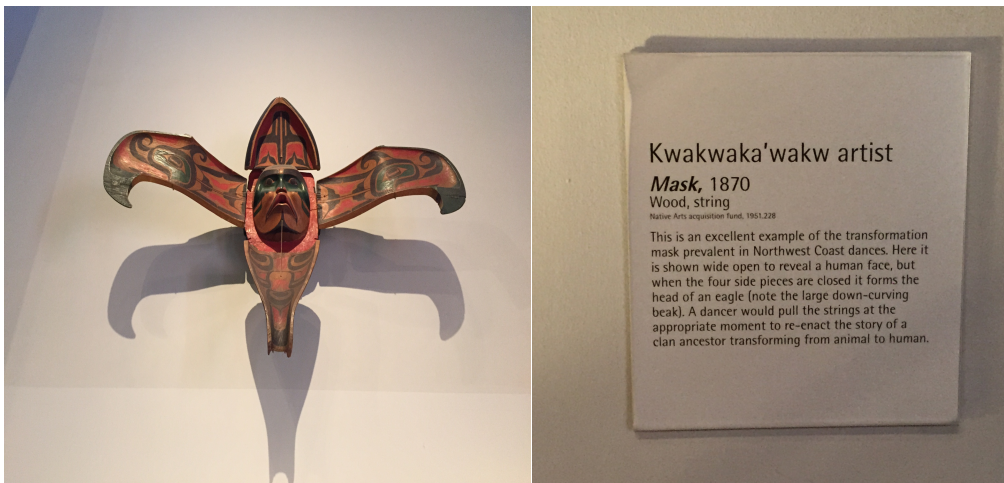


Figure 10 (left)—Mask, Kwakwaka’wakw artist, 1870, Wood and string, Native Arts acquisition fund, 1951.228

Figure 11 (right)—Object Label, American Indian Galleries, Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department

The mask, attributed to a Kwakwaka'wakw artist and dated 1870, is deemed “an excellent example of the transformation mask prevalent in the Northwest Coast dances.” The label explains that during the dance the dancer pulls concealed strings to re-enact the story of a clan ancestor. It also mentions that the mask is currently open to display the human face within the outer mask, which forms an eagle when closed.



Figure 12 (from left to right)—Dance Apron, Yurok artist, early 1900s, Hide, grass, bead, and shell, Gift of Mrs. Donald Bromfield, 1944.39; Dance Apron, Yurok artist, early 1900s, Seed, plant fiber, bead, and shell, Gift of Mrs. Donald Bromfield, 1944.38

The second display of dance objects in the American Indian galleries is on the third floor in the section of California objects. Pinned to two foam-core boards is a two-piece dance apron by a Yurok artist (Figure 12). The identification label reads, “Yurok artist, Dance Apron, early 1900s, Glass beads, leather, shells, plant fiber,” and the accession and donation information. In addition to the basic label there is a topical label entitled, “Musical Skirts and Aprons.” The label reveals that the two pieces are actually two components of one skirt and explains how the diverse composition of materials is the result of the Yurok’s abundant environment. The use of the skirt is described as simply

for special occasions and the final sentence of the label explains that the materials are used to produce resonant sounds during dances.

The final concentration of dance objects is in a case of moccasins entitled, “Expressive Footwear” (Figure 13).



Figure 13—Group of Moccasins from the museum’s permanent collection, American Indian galleries, Denver Art Museum, Native Arts Department

Twelve pairs of moccasins are numbered and arranged in a variety of different fashions, with some pairs angled on mounts towards the visitor and others with one shoe angled and the other shoe flat. The introductory label begins by stating that moccasins are more than mere foot protection, they are a reflection of the wearer. “Specific designs signal tribal identity, while lavish materials indicate high status.” The label continues by

identifying the moccasins in the case as originating from different Plains tribes, inviting visitors to observe the different styles and materials utilized in moccasin construction and read the topical labels that delve further into the specific meaning behind the different designs. It points to a particular pair of Ghost Dance moccasins as having an interesting story to tell.

To the right and left of the introductory label, two long, narrow labels provide visitors with basic identification information about the moccasins that correspond with the number. In addition to the basic identification label there are five topical labels that describe the different styles and uses of the moccasins to their origin communities. For example, the Ghost Dance pair is number twelve, and the corresponding basic label attributes the pair to Cheyenne and Kiowa artists dating back to the late 1800s. The Ghost Dance pair also has its own topical label, titled “Ghost Dance Moccasins,” which addresses how the pair was constructed by two different artists from two different tribes at two different times. The topical label gives a brief description of the Ghost Dance religion and explains how the pair on display was painted and danced by the Cheyenne during the Ghost Dance period from 1889-1890, and later embellished with beads and danced during the Kiowa Ghost Dance period from 1894-1916.

Exhibit Organization

In general, the exhibit layout of an art museum consists of “relatively empty spaces, with plenty of wall or floor space around the individual works” (Svasek 2007: 141). Dance object displays at the Denver Art Museum reflect this characterization,

especially in the African and Oceanic galleries in the Hamilton building. Both the African and Oceanic galleries at the Denver Art Museum are designed with open “vistas,” an uninterrupted line of sight across the gallery space. According to constructivist theorists, vistas help visitors orient themselves and decide which objects to investigate further (Monti and Keene 2013: 244). Vistas aid visitors in developing a strategy of approach, but without appropriate “orientation” or instruction on exhibit layout and design these large, open spaces can be overwhelming and imposing (Ibid.; Hein 1998).

The African and Oceanic galleries at the Denver Art Museum are not imposing or overwhelming in size, but the scope of the arts exhibited are vast and varied—breaking up the vistas could be beneficial for illustrating that point. There are multiple points of entry and exit in both the African and Oceanic galleries, which Perkarik et al. (2014) argue encourages visitor agency, as they can decide what most interests them. But Hein (1998) would argue that the lack of a clear flow could be confusing to visitors who prefer a predetermined path. Serrell (1996) argues that good conceptual and spatial organization makes visitors stay longer and prominently placed introductory labels can aid visitors in understanding the organization of the exhibit. The African and Oceanic galleries have introductory labels that provide an overview of the collection, but a set flow is not established in the exhibit spaces. In the Oceanic gallery, the introductory label is placed prominently on both ends of the exhibit space. The introductory label for the African galleries is not as easy to find, but is placed more centrally within the exhibit, perhaps the result of the number of possible entry and exit points.

Elements of dance object display at the Denver Art Museum characterize what Karp and Kratz (2014) would define as a “white cube” style of exhibition, with galleries designed with an emphasis on the visual experience, guiding visitors to react to basics such as form and color. Exhibits at Denver Art Museum maintain a uniform style—neutral wall colorings with object in cases or on platforms, same font on labels, layout identical from display to display. Most objects have only a basic information label, which provides limited contextual information to the visitor and reinforces their value as aesthetic objects. In the African and Oceanic galleries, one mask is displayed on a mannequin with the others placed in glass cases or mounted in isolation. Monti and Keene (2013) would identify this as a “pattern of practice,” often employed to communicate the function of the object to visitors, helping them to recognize the object’s context and apply it to the rest of the similar items on display (150). Patterns of display help orient the visitor, directing them to discover familiar connections to their own lives and past knowledge (Ibid.).

While the uniform style establishes a pattern of practice in the display of objects at the Denver Art Museum, art anthropologists argue that exhibiting works against a blank backdrop has drawbacks. Svasek (2007) states, “By recontextualizing objects that once had a very different purpose and location in new museum settings, the objects can effectively metamorphose into art, and the way viewers experience them can differ wildly from the way originally intended” (11). This is true for dance objects, as isolating pieces against blank backdrops alienates the viewer, creating a sense of limbo where the physical body is not welcome but the eye and the mind somehow are (O’Doherty 1986:

15). This limits the sensorial interaction between the object and viewer, denying visitors the multisensory experience that constructivist museum theorists argue positively influences visitor experience and changing the meaning of multisensory dance objects into objects of solely visual value (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Howes 2003; Drewal 2012). The white cube model is also problematic in the display of Indigenous and non-Western culture as O'Doherty (1986) argues, "The white cube...censors out the world of social variation, promoting a sense of the sole reality of its own point of view and, consequently, its endurance and eternal rightness" (9). Displaying Indigenous or non-Western objects without the proper context also fails to counteract past stereotypes, which Vogel (1988) and Bouttiaux (2012) identify as key to contemporary non-Western and Indigenous art display.

Art museums often employ specific lighting techniques to recontextualize an object as art. Lighting is an important component of exhibit design, as Kratz (2011) states, "Lighting is closely allied with space and color in a synergetic architecture of display, defining paths and pacing, delineating spaces, directing attention, and evoking ambience and atmosphere" (30). Art museums generally utilize spotlights or floodlights, which Kratz (2011) believes highlights the object's importance and suggests high value, with white or natural lighting suggesting the object's authenticity and aestheticism (31-2). Consistent with displays throughout the museum, masks in the African and Oceanic galleries with distinctive features or style are isolated in individual cases, with spotlights to highlight the objects' features. Uniform methods of display can be useful in combatting centuries of different standards for Western versus non-Western art, but this

method of display is problematic for dance object displays, which require additional contextual and sensorial information.

An important factor in exhibit organization at Denver Art Museum that counteracts the drawbacks of a white cube model of display is the location of the galleries. In the past, art museums have created clear distinctions between Western and non-Western art. This distinction was manifest in separate display spaces or use of non-Western work as a foil to Western pieces (Price 1989; Svasek 2007; Klonk 2009). At the Denver Art Museum, the African and Oceanic galleries are on the same floors as the contemporary Western art collection in the Hamilton building. The location is a statement, a conscious choice to illustrate that African and Oceanic art are not relics of the past, but a continual and new traditions that should be interpreted and displayed alongside contemporary art (J. Lukavic, personal communication 2014). The location of the African and Oceanic galleries allows visitors the opportunity to compare African and Oceanic art to the Western (and increasingly non-Western) contemporary art displayed on the third and fourth floors. This is an important step towards more appropriate displays of Indigenous and non-Western art, genres art museums have struggled to address in the past (Nason 1987; Errington 2005). The placement of the African collection signals the visitor to view the African works as art and communicates to visitors its continuity, which Price (1989) argues are two important steps in democratizing and decolonizing non-Western and Indigenous art display.

While the location of the African and Oceanic galleries sends a clear message, elements of the displays contradict its statement. The majority of items displayed in the

African and Oceanic galleries are historical items, based on the dates provided on the basic information labels. This is a common problem, as Svasek (2007) explains that the majority of ethnographic collections were founded based on major acquisitions in the nineteenth century. Fowler and Fowler (1996) argue that these items were collected and displayed based on the idea of the ethnographic present, representing non-Western collections in a timeless, “day before” acculturative forces manner. This approach led to non-Western art and material culture being represented as “static traditions...intact and unaltered” (Price 1989: 110). Objects from this period were often modified in size, weight, material, etc. due to long ship or train journeys (Svasek 2007: 132). Other objects were commissioned to be especially bizarre to appeal to audiences back home (Ibid.). These factors make it very difficult to combat stereotypes perpetuated by past displays utilizing items from this period. The museum could counter colonial influences on the collection by discussing of how these attitudes continue to influence non-Western object display, or by acknowledging the historical nature of the collection, but at present there is no discussion or acknowledgement of the collection’s history in the African and Oceanic galleries.

The location of the American Indian galleries is not as significant as the African and Oceanic collections. The American Indian galleries are located in the older North building, connected by a pedestrian bridge to the more recent Hamilton building. The separation between the starkly contemporary and more traditional exhibit spaces is unfortunate, but curators have attempted to address the separation by renovating the North building galleries. In 1995, the Native Arts department brought together a diverse

group of Native community representatives to discuss the revision of the Native galleries' overall themes and structure (Hill 2000). As a result of this session, and additional discussions with Native representatives, the galleries were renovated in 2010 (Ibid.). The renovation removed objects from their glass cases and redesigned the rooms, constructing white "islands" with wavy edges surrounded by meandering paths of dark carpets (Ibid.). Objects are evenly spaced on the risers of the islands, allowing visitors to see most items at all angles. Contemporary Native art is displayed alongside historic pieces, and exhibits address contemporary issues of the American Indian art genre (J. Lukavic, Personal Communication 2014). Today, Marie Watt's *Blanket Tower* (2013), a collection of blankets and their "stories" or significance to Native and primarily non-Native families and individuals, soars high next to nineteenth century totem poles on the second floor. Upstairs, Jeffrey Gibson's work *Freedom* (2013), a sculpture of teepee poles and rawhide painted with acrylic paints in abstract designs, juxtaposes an historic teepee display.

Gallery spaces for contemporary Native art continue to shift at Denver Art Museum. In the fall of 2013, the exhibit *Sovereign: Independent Voices* opened on the third floor of the Hamilton building, featuring the work of three contemporary Native artists—Rose Simpson, Kent Monkman and Virgil Ortiz. Another exhibit of contemporary Native art, Virgil Ortiz's *Revolt 1680/2180*, opened in the summer of 2015. As I have illustrated, exhibit location is important in shifting visitor perception and understanding of Native and non-Western art. The Denver Art Museum has acknowledged the issue and is addressing it by exhibiting past and present items together in the main galleries and, at least in the case of *Sovereign* and *Revolt 1680/2180*,

consciously selecting spaces in the Hamilton building that allow for a comparison between Native and non-Western art and contemporary Western examples.

While several elements of exhibit organization reflect the white cube model of display, curators at Denver Art Museum moderate their approach through their decisions regarding non-Western and Indigenous exhibit design and location. They are consulting with Native groups about the design and themes of exhibitions in the American Indian galleries and displaying contemporary non-Western artists such as African artist El Anatsui to complement and expand their primarily historical collection. They are bringing contemporary Native art into the traditionally Western contemporary galleries and collaborating with contemporary Native artists on standalone exhibits such as *Sovereign* and *Revolt 1680/2180*. In these ways, curators at Denver Art Museum combat the drawbacks of isolative display techniques.

Exhibit Narrative

Kratz (2011) defines an exhibit's narrative as the text and graphics present in the displays. The style or tone of exhibition texts is communicated through vocabulary, word choice, tense, use of first person and adjectives (Ibid., 37). In art exhibitions, it is common practice to provide only limited information about the objects—mainly the name of the artist, the year of production, the title of the work and the chosen technique (Berlo 2005; Ting 2010). Art museums generally exclude contextual or multisensory elements, which Hatcher (1999) and Morphy and Perkins (2006) argue removes the object from the context necessary for the visitor to understand them. In addition, Svasek (2007) argues

that the underlying message of this approach is that “aesthetic objects have the transcendental power to speak for themselves...” (141). The majority of dance object displays at the Denver Art Museum reflect that institutional inclination, as the inclusion of context in interpretive materials is not a major priority (J. Lukavic, personal communication 2014).

But Clifford (1991), Price (1989) and Phillips (2005) have observed increasing overlap in the disciplines of art history and anthropology, and this convergence of approaches can be observed in some dance object displays at the Denver Art Museum. Several dance object display narratives feature contextual elements divergent from the aesthetic, “white wall” model of display. Some labels, like the ones for the Kwakwaka’wakw mask and the Oceanic dance masks, expand on basic information labels illuminating details of the mask’s construction and functional use to their host community. Some labels describe the setting of the object on display, providing the visitor with additional context. For example, the introductory label for the Egungun mask begins, “Imagine this mask in an African festival, spinning and swaying to lively music and drumming.” Hein (1998) would argue that the text’s visual imagery helps the visitor imagine the original context of the object and provides clues to its meaning.

There are two labels in the Northwest Coast mask display, “Magic in the Firelight” and “Potlatch and Privilege,” which provide important contextual information or acknowledge the masks’ multisensory dimension through expressive language. “Magic by the Firelight” contains descriptive language, which helps orient visitors to the object’s performed context as well as acknowledge the multisensory nature of the object

(Roscoe 1995; Ting 2010). “Potlatch and Privilege” discusses the role of clan ownership in the design of the masks, the structure of Northwest Coast society and acknowledges that the masks displayed were created for a variety of purposes. Remarking on group ownership and identifying individual artists are key to the display of Indigenous works, as it gives agency to Native communities in the ownership of their material culture and levels the playing field for the recognition and celebration of Indigenous and non-Western artists (Clifford 1991; Price 1989). The multisensory nature of dance objects is also addressed in the label for the Yurok dance apron, “Musical Skirts and Aprons,” which explains that the skirt is used to produce sound during dances.

The examples described above show evidence of overlap in approaches between the disciplines, but contextual information continues to be excluded from the majority of objects on display. Alland Jr. (1992) notes that critical museologists may advocate for context, but the host culture or artist may prefer formal-aesthetic presentation (64). Dr. Lukavic reiterates that assertion, stating that several contemporary Native artists request the reduction of context in the display of their work (Personal Communication 2014). While this is certainly a valid argument in the approach to contemporary Indigenous and non-Western works, dance objects have multisensory dimensions that cannot be addressed without contextual analysis (Beeman 1993; Bouttiaux 2012).

Anthropologists and art historians are beginning to complicate and rewrite discourse on non-Western art and culture (Errington 2005: 228). One way museums can acknowledge and address issues of representation is through exhibit narratives. The displays at Denver Art Museum illustrate shortcomings by addressing current issues

regarding representation of non-Western objects and art. Critical museologists believe that simply displaying cultural objects in the aesthetic fashion is not enough to combat two centuries of stereotypes promoted by past museum exhibits (Vogel 1988; Bouttiaux 2012). Vogel (1991) argues that labels must acknowledge contemporary issues of representation to make displays and narratives about non-Western art more appropriate. Lindauer (2007) reiterates this assertion specifically for art museums stating, "...when captions are didactic, they should disrupt Anglo-American myths that sustain cultural domination" (311).

There are several aspects of the narrative in dance object displays at the Denver Art Museum that utilize reflexive analysis to engage with contemporary issues of representation. The conclusion to the label "Potlatch and Privilege" alludes to debates of authenticity and the art/artifact distinction by discussing how different masks have been made for ceremony, tourism and the art market. In the literature, "authenticity" is argued to be a construction of social and political power, with Western curators and art dealers possessing the "cultural, symbolic and social capital to decide which artifacts were authentic and which were not" (Svasek 2007: 133). By acknowledging the varied history and function of the masks on display, the museum acknowledges and complicates the aesthetic display and invites visitors to reflect on how collection practices shape their understanding of the objects displayed. It also returns some agency to Native artists and communities, as Lonetree (2012) explains, "creating tourist art on reservations became a method for Indigenous people to carve out ways of making a living during extremely difficult economic times" (28). Additionally, by stating that some of the masks were

created for the art market, the label promotes the idea of Native art as contemporary and continuous, contracting past narratives of Native art as static or traditional (Errington 2005).

Another important practice for contemporary representation is the identification and acknowledgement of the artist (Clifford 1991; Price 1989). Morphy (1990) argues, “The naming of [Indigenous] artists in museums and galleries may impose change on the status of artist in the producing culture” (476). Artists are demanding a more interpretive role and there has been a large influx of voices from underrepresented groups (Price 1989: 131). The majority of mask labels in the Northwest Coast area identify the individual artist and their cultural affiliation. The film in the Northwest Coast mask exhibit highlights the role of mask carvers in contemporary ceremony and provides the written definition of the cultural group. The film, along with the label “Magic in the Firelight,” emphasize that mask designs are owned by specific clans and dance societies, countering the history of stripping artists and culture bearers from ownership in museum displays (Clifford 1991). This is important because Price (1989) argues that “assumptions of anonymity” prevented non-Western art from being viewed as contemporary (110). In the Northwest Coast mask exhibit individual artists are now recognized and celebrated, but Price (1989) suggests the next step is allowing non-Western artists the right to acknowledge their origins by choice rather than mandate. Dr. Lukavic agrees with Price’s (1989) suggestion, stating that he consults with artists about their inspiration and motivations, but interpretive text is limited to the bare minimum for contemporary Native works (Personal Communication, 2014).

Another display that reflects contemporary issues of representation is the Egungun mask in the African gallery. The introductory label begins with an acknowledgement of the inadequacies of museum display stating, “[An African masquerade] is a far cry from the still environment of an art museum.” The label continues, citing conservation as a major issue in the use of motion in dance object display: “Movement and art don’t generally mix well in museums, which are dedicated to protecting and preserving their collections.” Despite these challenges, museum staff identified their static pattern of display as inappropriate for the Egungun mask and responded by engineering a new method for the interpretation and display of a dance object. By acknowledging issues with dance object display and discussing the difference between the museum environment and the mask’s original context, the introductory label utilizes reflexive analysis. By highlighting the mask’s original context, as well as the challenges of displaying the objects in the museum environment, the display engages with the issue of object transition in interpretation and display.

Svasek (2007) defines object transition as the changes that occur to the meaning, value and status of the object and how it affects how people experience them (4). Museum objects are prime subjects for the study of object transition as, “the very nature of an object changes when it becomes a museum object...The moment that it is purchased or accepted by the museum it takes on a new quality” (Cameron 2004: 70). To counteract the forces of transition, Fowler and Fowler (1996) advise museums to collect extensive provenance information on their collections, revealing what Pearce (1993) termed the “accumulated meanings” of an object’s life as it has moved from place to

place. This information is then relayed to the visitor, who can then understand the influence of the museum's narrative on their perception of the objects displayed (Vogel 1988). Utilizing reflexive analysis, the Egungun mask display addresses issues of object transition and conservation and serves as an important example of how to succinctly and tactfully convey that information to the museum visitor.

There are still some issues the museum could address, namely the reduction of authoritative voice and the expansion of reflexive analysis in exhibit narratives. The majority of dance object labels do not include contextual information or address issues of representation, which is necessary for the complexity Indigenous and non-Western dance objects. Two of the topic labels for Oceanic masks are written in past tense, signaling to the visitor that these cultures are static or extinct (Bouttiaux 2012). Additionally, artists were not recognized for any of the dance objects in the African and Oceanic galleries. Kingery (1996) argues that failure to identify individual artists is often the result of improper documentation. Omitting the individual artist can also be the result of past collecting practices, where the information was not gathered or, as Price (1989) would argue, valued at the time of collection and is therefore missing at the time of museum acquisition (Ibid.). It can also be a choice on behalf of the artist, who might feel ownership of the design belongs to a larger family or cultural group (Caro 2012; Clifford 1991). Provenance and collection documentation have become a crucial part of the donation and gift-giving process to museums, as the responsibilities of appropriate interpretation and display are often dependent upon that information (Fowler and Fowler 1996). While working at the Denver Art Museum, one of the projects I worked on was

the retroactive collection of provenance information. This involved contacting the artist's family, if known, or collaborating with tribal experts to determine what family or group the design could be attributed to. This work was time-consuming and often unsuccessful, instilling in me the knowledge that sometimes this information can never be recovered.

Representational Strategies: Multisensory Elements

Edson and Dean (1994) argue that exhibits should “not rely on oral or written descriptions for interpretation,” and instead “use sensory stimuli (sound, smell, touch, and taste) to reinforce visual information” (181-2). Hein (1998) categorizes sensory stimuli in museums as visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory (smell, and in some rare cases, taste). Most displays at Denver Art Museum rely on solely visual display strategies, exhibiting the objects in cases or on platforms and providing text to interpret them. Multisensory elements are believed to be crucial to contemporary object interpretation and display. Diversifying the approach to dance objects through the use of multisensory elements expands the interpretive context and provides visitors with a more comprehensive idea of the objects' meaning. Monti and Keene (2013) believe that displays that utilize unconventional representational strategies and present thought-provoking concepts and themes are more attractive to the museum visitor (250). The use of motion and music in the displays creates more immersive experiences for the visitor while conveying the multisensory dimension of dance objects to museum visitors (Wright 2010). Multisensory elements are especially helpful in art museums, as Morphy and Perkins (2006) state, “...Visual art is often produced as part of a performance that equally

involves other media, or if it occurs separately it cross refers to artistic practice in other media” (13). Multimedia and multisensory exhibits can also enhance aesthetic approaches as they refer to the context of the artistic process and reveal more about the piece exhibited (Hatcher 1999). Despite the overall dominance of visual representation at Denver Art Museum, there are examples of multisensory elements. The use of motion and music in the Egungun mask display engages with multiple senses. The language in “Magic in the Firelight” alludes to the masks’ multisensory context and the accompanying video briefly shows its performed context, although auditory elements are excluded. The label for the Yupok dance apron also discusses its auditory dimension, although there is no audio provided.

Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma

A collection of over two hundred and fifty thousand Native American artifacts comprises the museum’s anthropology collection, exhibited to “tell the story of the many peoples and cultures that have made the American experience unique and complex” (Gilcrease 2015). The anthropology collection is distinguished from the Western “fine art” collection, which is described as “10,000 paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures by 400 artists from colonial times to the present” (Ibid.). The majority of dance objects are contained within the exhibit, *Enduring Spirit: Native American Artistic Traditions*, located on the main floor of the museum, immediately to the left of the ticket sales desk. Photographs are not permitted in the Native American galleries at the Gilcrease and are thus excluded from this section of my analysis. The introductory panel describes the

exhibition as an introduction to Native creative expressions, showing the “rich diversity of America’s enduring Native artistic traditions,” which include, “music, dance, ceremony and the visual arts.” The panel states that the exhibition is organized geographically, exhibiting “finest” art from the selected regions.

There are several displays in *Enduring Spirit* that include dance objects. Two glass cases in the second room feature dance objects or discuss the role of dance in Native life. The first display is a small television screen playing excerpts from *Into the Circle: An Introduction to Oklahoma Powwows and Celebrations* (1992). The film discusses the history of powwow and Native gatherings and the purpose of the powwows to contemporary Native peoples (Swearington 1992). The screen is mounted on the wall between a glass case of Plains’ horse regalia and a text panel outlining the different purposes of buffalo hides. On the same wall, near the exit to the next room, is a glass case of moccasins, ten pairs mounted on Plexiglas affixed to the case’s walls. Beneath the moccasin case are a selection of items that visitors can touch—a pair of beaded moccasins, a toy cradleboard, a rosette and a dance purse. Each item has a label that identifies the object, its attributed group or region, the date and material composition.

In the fifth room of the exhibit, one of the cases contains several Cherokee dance masks. The dance masks are mounted on brass rods with labels reading, “Dance mask, Cherokee, 20th Century, wood, paint, accession number.” Next to that case is another case reserved for objects from the Northwest Coast, including an inlaid feast dish and a dance mask. The label for the mask reads, “Dance mask, Tlingit, ca. 1900, copper, wood,

bone, accession number, collection and donor.” The mask is also mounted on a brass t-shaped mount and the accession number is visible on the back of the mask in white paint.

While *Enduring Spirit* features a number of examples of dance objects, it is not the theme of the exhibition. As the introductory panel states, the purpose of the exhibition is an introduction to the regional diversity of Native American creative expression. There is one area of the museum, however, that features dance objects exclusively. The fourth room of *Enduring Spirits* serves as a second entrance and alternate exit to the exhibition. If a visitor chooses to enter or exit this way they must walk down a long corridor lined with objects and art from Central and South America. The first section of this corridor features exclusively dance masks from Mexico. Aptly titled, *Mexican Masks*, the gallery displays an array of diverse types of dance masks hailing from different regions in Mexico. Lining the two walls of the corridor are low platforms with a black bar barriers. The masks are either mounted to the walls or placed on the platforms using t-shaped floor mounts (Figure 14).

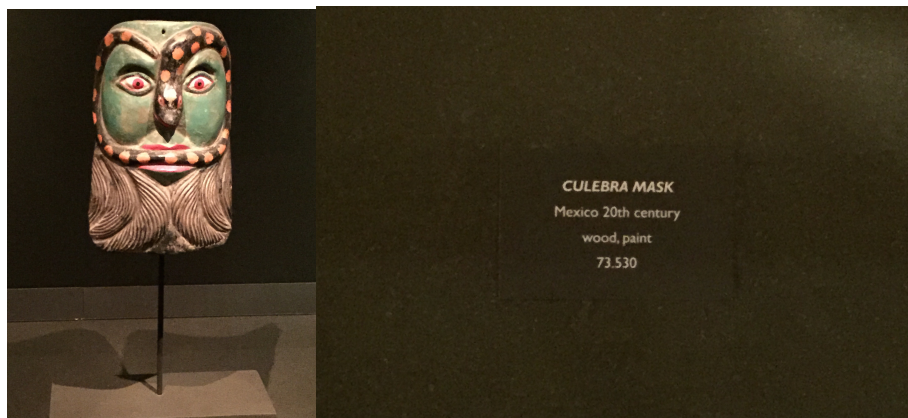


Figure 14 (left)–Culebra Mask, 20th Century, Mexico, Wood, GM 7347.530

Figure 15 (right)–Basic Information Label, Culebra Mask, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

The masks are displayed in isolation, but there are two additional interpretive elements. An introductory panel (Figure 16) describes the history and meaning of mask wearing in the region, and emphasizing their continued place in Mexican culture. The label states, “Masked dances and festivals continue to be used as forms of social, political, and religious expression. Dance masks have become vibrant symbols of regional Mexican culture, symbols of an ancient and diverse cultural heritage.”

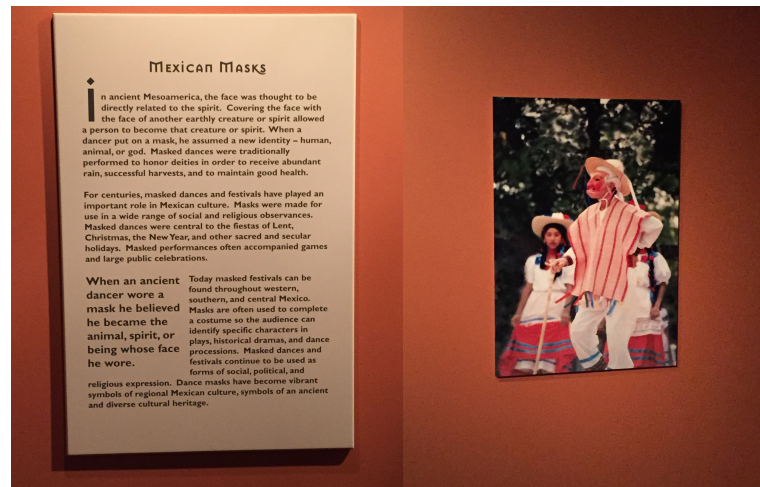


Figure 16 (left)–Topic Label, *Mexican Masks* exhibit, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

Figure 17 (right)–Photograph in *Mexican Masks* exhibit, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

Like *Enduring Spirit*, the individual mask labels (Figure 15) feature the type of mask, its date of construction and its accession information, but four enlarged color photographs (Figure 17) are included in *Mexican Masks*’ interpretive materials. Placed in the corners of the display areas, two photos show masked dancers in full regalia. The other two photographs are close-ups of different elements of the Mexican masquerade costume—a skirt and footwear and a dancer wearing a headdress with no mask. The photographs do not have identification labels and the masks in the photograph do not match any of the masks on display.

Mexican masks are also featured in the exhibit, *Focus on Favorites: Masterworks of the Gilcrease*. Three masks are mounted to the wall (Figure 18), designated A, B, and C with a corresponding caption and topic label to the right of the display (Figure 19). The label provides the type of mask, date, region, accession number and donor information, as well as a brief description of the history and significance of the dance or ceremony the mask represents.

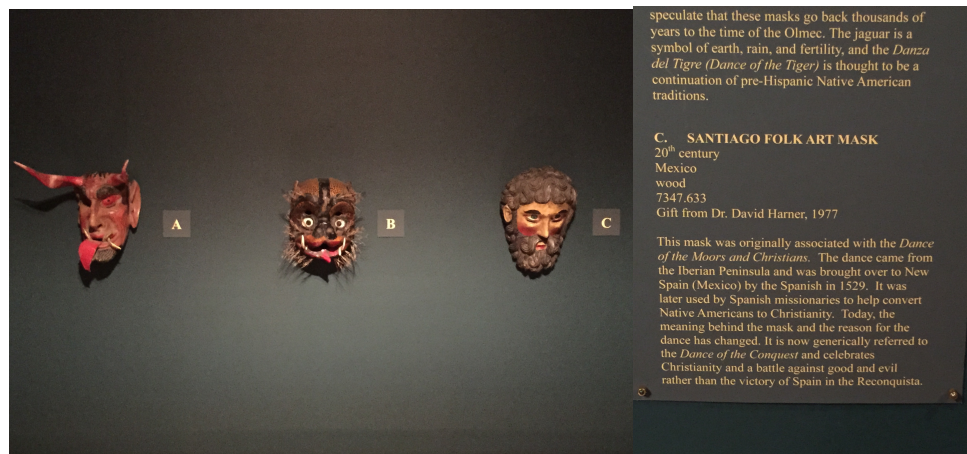


Figure 18 (left, from left to right)—El Diablo “Devil” Folk Art Mask, 20th century, Guerrero, Mexico, Wood, Goat Horn, Feather, Pigment, GM 7347.607; Tiger “Tigre” Folk Art Mask, 20th century, Mexico, Wood, Leather, Boar Hair, Boar Teeth, GM 7347.687; Santiago Folk Art Mask, 20th century, Mexico, Wood, GM 7347.633

Figure 19 (right)—Basic Information and Topic Label, in exhibit *Focus on Favorites: Masterworks of the Gilcrease*, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

Exhibit Organization

The Native American exhibits at the Gilcrease are arranged geographically by tribal region. Lonetree (2012) argues that regional categorization obscures cultural diversity and gives the sense that “all tribes are the same or at least the same in a particular region” (30). Svasek (2007) argues that regional categorization restricts regional creative expression, creating ideas of “right” and “wrong” aesthetic traditions for

certain groups, encumbering future creativity. Some tribal groups prefer regional categorization, as evidenced by the continued regional displays at the Denver Art Museum following consultation sessions with Native advisors in the late 1990s, but Hill (2000) suggests exhibits might instead focus on particular types of media or themes (43).

The spatial configuration of the exhibit reinforces the regional categorization of Native American creative expressions, with rooms dedicated to certain regions. Unlike the Denver Art Museum, there are no vistas; the exhibit is divided into seven rooms with narrow hallways and passages between. The organization of the exhibit is contradictory to its stated theme. The introductory label explains the purpose of the displays is “an introduction to these creative expressions by Native artists, ancient, historical and contemporary.” While the objects in the cases range from prehistoric to Modern period, which Bouttiaux (2012) and Russell (2012) claim is helpful in displaying non-Western and Indigenous art as continuous and evolving, there are few examples of contemporary pieces and the dates of the objects are not emphasized beyond small identification labels. Price (1989) argues that without the proper organization and interpretation, displays of non-Western culture can appear stuck in time, static and unchanging to the museum visitor. With interpretive contextual information, contemporary objects could be distinguished from ancient pieces. But at present contemporary examples are displayed in the same conventional fashion as historic and prehistoric examples, making it difficult for visitors to make a distinction.

This strategy is particularly problematic in one case. In the room devoted to tribal groups from the Southeastern region of the United States, a case devoted to the display of

Mississippian era artifacts is placed in the middle of the Southeastern section with no label or explanation. Mississippian era artifacts hail from as early as 700 A.D., representing a vastly different culture than the other items in the section from the nineteenth and twentieth century (National Park Service 2015). There is no discussion of the immense scope of Mississippian culture or that was well known for extensive trade across regions, as evidenced by the variety of materials present in the objects' composition; there is no discussion of how these objects represent periods before colonial contact and the widespread removal of Southeastern tribes to Indian territory (Ibid.). With appropriate labeling and educational elements, these objects could be utilized as evidence of the ancient origins of contemporary Native cultural expression or as an illustration of how Native cultural expression has evolved over time in the Southeastern region, but currently their placement hampers the exhibit narrative of continuance in Native cultural expression and reinforces stereotypes of Native culture as static and unchanging.

Another problematic area of organization is the Plains' culture room. The room features excerpts from the film, *Into the Circle: An Introduction to Native American Powwows* (1993), which discusses powwows and their significance to contemporary Native society. The film is an opportunity for visitors to engage with a contemporary Native artistic expression, but it is out of place next to a display of historic buffalo leather goods and has no label to explain the contemporary nature of the festivals and their importance to current Native communities. If the visitor pays close attention they may have a clue as to the time period in which it was filmed, but no date is provided in the

excerpt and there is no label with production details. Additionally, there is no bench or chair for the visitor to sit and watch the film clips, so the design does not encourage visitors to linger in that area (Hein 1998). I would suggest that the film be moved to the first room of *Enduring Spirits* where it could be utilized as a supplement to the introductory panel, emphasizing the importance of ongoing artistic expressions in Native communities and fulfilling the exhibit's message of continuance and endurance.

Exhibit Narrative

The lack of interpretive text at the Gilcrease greatly restricts its narrative. The majority of dance object labels only identify the object, its attributed group or region, date and material composition. Some objects in *Enduring Spirit* are presented with contextual elements, such as the use of a horse mannequin to display horse regalia in the second room of the exhibit, but the dance objects are placed in glass cases without contextual elements or contextual information in their labels. The lack of contextual elements undermines the theme or message of the exhibition, which claims to represent all Native creative expression, including music and dance.

Expanding the interpretive text in *Enduring Spirit* would allow curators to speak to larger issues such as cultural survival and endurance, intercultural and intertribal dialogue and the progression of design and material composition in Native creative expressions, at present these objects can only communicate limited messages of form and function to museum visitors. The only label in the Native American art galleries that speaks to larger issues of representation is the introductory label to *Enduring Spirit*. The

label begins by stating that Native American art is a story of “change, continuity and endurance.” The label describes the “breadth” of Native American art as “encompass[ing] the sacred and the secular, the political and the domestic, the ceremonial and the commercial.” These themes could have been utilized to explore any region of Native American art, to illustrate the diversity of objects made by these communities and to discuss their multiple meanings in contemporary Native life. Unfortunately, these themes are not discussed in the exhibit beyond this example.

The introductory label continues, illuminating the meaning behind the exhibit’s title and revealing the exhibit’s theme: “Throughout America, many Native peoples continue their ancient worldviews and lifeways often expressed through music, dance, ceremony, and the visual arts. Despite centuries of epidemics, cultural, religious and political repression, and forced removals from homelands, Native traditions continue. *Enduring Spirit: Native American Artistic Traditions* is an introduction to these creative expressions by Native artists, ancient, historic, and contemporary. The exhibition is organized geographically, presenting some of the finest art from the selected regions. Nevertheless, this presentation offers only a brief introduction to the rich diversity of America’s enduring Native artistic traditions.”

There are several words utilized in the label that allude to broader discussions in contemporary Indigenous representation. Many critical museologists and art anthropologists find the terms “ancient” and “traditional” problematic when discussing contemporary Native American culture. They feel that the term “ancient” does nothing to combat past representations of Native art as static and traditional and does not aid in a

narrative of continuance (Bouttiaux 2012). Some view the word “tradition” as equally damaging. Price (1989) describes it as one of the most counterproductive words in Indigenous and non-Western representation as, like the terms “folk” or “craft,” it was one of the primary words utilized by past curators and scholars to distinguish Indigenous and non-Western art from Western art.

But as curators increasingly discuss these terms with contemporary Native artists, some museologists advocate the use of the term traditional. Bernstein (2012) argues that most Native artists “do not bother with distinctions between contemporary and traditional because they are unnecessary. Such distinctions represent an imposed notion of time more reliant on a non-Indian sense of longing and sentimentality than an accurate way to describe art” (31). Tradition has come to represent community and a common history rather than a concrete set of artistic styles dictated by a foreign cannon (Ibid., 32). Contemporary Native artists internalize tradition and utilize it as a base to evolve and create something new. As Tlingit artist Nicolas Galanin explains,

“The line between traditional and contemporary is blurred...It’s important to understand the history and to ground myself within that foundation before trying to expand too much. On the other hand, as an artist, I hope to offer something different and new” (Ibid., 35).

If the introductory label or a contextual label for a contemporary piece utilized Native voice to discuss the new use of the term “traditional” then perhaps its use would be justified, but at present the exhibit does not engage in a broader discussion of issues of representation in Native communities.

In contrast to *Enduring Spirit*, the introductory panel for *Mexican Masks* provides contextual information about the meaning and use of the masks during social and

religious events in Mexico. The label begins by stating that in ancient Mesoamerica the face was thought to be the seat of the spirit and covering it with a mask was believed to have transformative properties. It then addresses how masked dances have transitioned into religious events, which take place around major Catholic “fiestas” like Lent and Christmas as well as secular holidays. The final paragraph acknowledges that masked festivals continue to be popular in western, southern and central Mexico, but it does not provide information on the differences between the regions or their masquerade attire. The label concludes by stating: “Masked dances and festivals continue to be used as forms of social, political, and religious expression. Dance masks have become vibrant symbols of regional Mexican culture, symbols of an ancient and diverse cultural heritage.”

These sentences are an example of how the theme of continuance and endurance could have been applied in *Enduring Spirit*. The label describes the history and meaning behind the objects and concludes with their contemporary meaning in Mexican communities. The masks themselves do not have contextual information in this display, but the prominently placed introductory label and photographs provide visitors with important contextual information not included in basic information labels.

The labels for the Mexican masks in the *Focus on Favorites* exhibit contain the most contextual information. The label is located significantly separate from the masks and is hard to view or read— one must lean sideways over a barrier to get a closer look— but if the visitor is willing they will be rewarded with insight into the different styles and

uses of the masks. Each mask has a small paragraph that provides the visitor a wealth of information and a variety of avenues to explore further.

For the first mask, “El Diablo,” the label discusses how the mask is a combination of influences, what community it might have originated from and the dance the mask is associated with. It provides a history and time frame for the visitor to situate the object in, which is crucial to visitor understanding (Hein 1998). The label for the “Tigre” mask describes its origin and the evolving meaning of the jaguar symbol, but it does not provide the mask’s contemporary meaning, which is not helpful for narratives of continuance or contemporary Mexican art. The label for the final mask, “Santiago,” acknowledges how the meaning of the mask and associated dance have changed over time, providing the visitor with a greater understanding of the mask’s history and its contemporary purpose in Mexican culture.

With the exception of the film excerpt from *Into the Circle*, Native voice is excluded from the exhibit narrative. Instead, the exhibit’s minimal interpretive text is written in authoritative voice. Gurian (2006) argues that labels use authoritative voice to distance the audience from the museum professional and reinforce the idea of the institution as objective and rational. Authoritative voice also aids in the continued suppression of Indigenous and non-Western narratives by insinuating that the maker or origin community is inferior and subjective (Ibid.). Clifford (1991) and Ames (1992) argue that authoritative voice should be minimized in favor of more collaborative narratives that include Native voice, but at the Gilcrease there is no evidence of consultation or collaboration in their exhibit narrative. The theme of continuance and

endurance is a positive one, but the museum needs to acknowledge the limitations of their primarily historical collection and make an effort to communicate those limitations to the museum visitor.

Representational Strategies: Multisensory Elements

While the label refers to other Native artistic traditions, they are not present in how the objects are displayed. Other than the misplaced film on powwows, dance is not mentioned in any contextual labels. There is no audio or video of Native musicians playing the instruments on display. There are no photographs or videos of the displayed dance objects being performed and there are no contextual labels describing the associated dance or the object's use within that context. With no clues to the objects' meaning, the text in *Enduring Spirit* does not aid in visitor understanding of Native American creative expressions, contrary to its stated goal. The introductory label to *Enduring Spirit* claims the purpose of the exhibit is to show the rich diversity of artistic traditions, including dance and music, but the majority of the objects displayed include no multisensory analysis. The absence of multisensory analysis continues the precedent of museums being unable to address the “complexity of [Indigenous] cultural values and in [Indigenous] engagement of a plurality of senses” (Classen and Howes 2006: 212).

There are more contextual elements in *Mexican Masks* display, but no multisensory elements. The masks themselves have only individual basic information labels, but four large photographs flank the display. Hoskins (1998) argues that photographs provide more contextual information than text alone and are therefore

helpful with multisensory objects, but Farnell (2006) believes they are still inadequate for representing objects with performative dimensions. The photographs provide the visitor with a clearer “picture” of how the masks are worn and fit into the other regalia, but the masks in the photographs do not match any of the mask styles displayed. Furthermore, the photographs have no information about the photographer, date the photograph was taken, or the group or artist depicted, so the origin and potential implications of the photograph are unknown.

Major contrasts in aesthetic and ethnographic approaches are illustrated in the two displays of Mexican masks at the Gilcrease. The introductory label for *Mexican Masks* details their use and meaning in contemporary Mexican society. The display also features photographs to give the visitor an idea of the masks’ performed context. The masks in the *Focus on Favorites* section are hung and lit in isolation, signaling to the viewer that they are more authentic and of higher aesthetic value (Kratz 2011). Contextual information is present in the label, but the label is not conveniently placed for visitor viewing. Together, these strategies communicate how these masks can be viewed as both cultural and art objects, but this message cannot be conveyed unless the visitor sees both displays, which would be difficult as they are separated by several exhibits.

The *Into the Circle* film addresses dance and its role in contemporary Native society, but it does not show the visitor the performed context of any of the objects on display around it. The “hands-on” area next to the moccasin display allows visitors to tactically engage with the objects, which Hatcher (1999) argues is crucial to object interpretation and visitor understanding, but beyond texture it does not reveal its meaning

as the sample objects are affixed to a wooden board. And, as Classen and Howes (2006) state, "...mere tactile engagement with an artifact will not necessarily deepen one's understanding of its cultural role. Sensory content, therefore, would need to be placed in cultural context" (Classen and Howes 2006: 219). Without the appropriate context or use of multisensory elements, dance object displays at the Gilcrease fail to acknowledge the multisensory nature of dance objects or address the mandates of new museum theory.

Denver Museum of Nature and Science

The anthropology collections at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science are housed in the Mary W.A. and Francis V. Crane American Indian Hall on the second floor in the far, back northwestern corner of the museum. The galleries feature a diverse array of American Indian objects, organized geographically by region with cases representing specific groups. The methods of representation vary, but in general the exhibits focus on the cultural significance of the objects, with labels describing the purpose and meaning of the objects in daily or ritual life. There are eight cases that feature dance objects, most displaying the objects consistent with the method described above. My analysis will focus on two displays that reflect the most theoretical concepts, but first let me provide an overview of the approaches to dance object display in the other six examples of dance objects in Crane Hall. The Denver Museum of Nature and Science has granted permission for the use of images in this study. All images originate from the Mary W.A. and Francis V. Crane American Indian Hall; image details are provided in the text of this document.



Figure 20

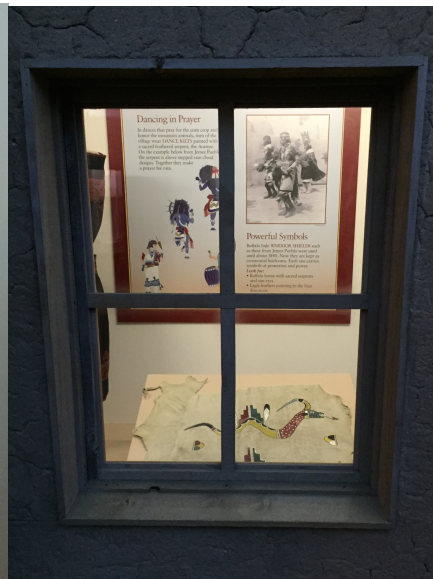


Figure 21

Pascu Yaqui Easter Ceremony regalia (Figure 20)—mask, sticks, moth cocoon rattles and tambourine-like instrument—are mounted to the wall in a close layout. The layout mimics a consolidated head-to-toe configuration and is displayed next to other objects from the region. The cocoon rattle mount consists of a wooden foot-shaped base that juts out perpendicular to the wall and painted cardboard “legs,” which the rattles have been placed over. Neither the mask nor the sticks and tambourine have head or hand shaped mounts. The display of a Jemez Pueblo dance kilt (Figure 21) consists of a large platform that the kilt lays upon, a medium-sized label that describes its use, including diagrams of dance movement and a photograph of dancers wearing kilts, all enclosed in a glass case designed to mimic an adobe building.

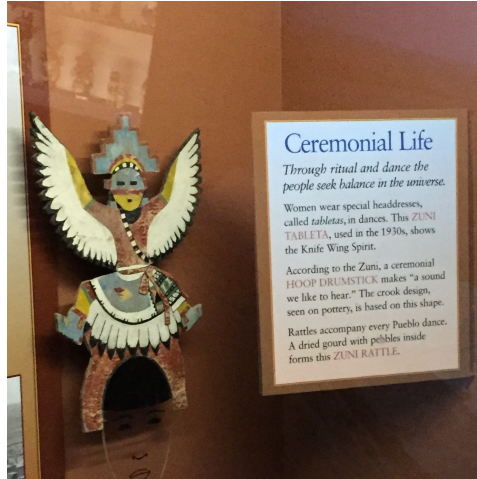


Figure 22

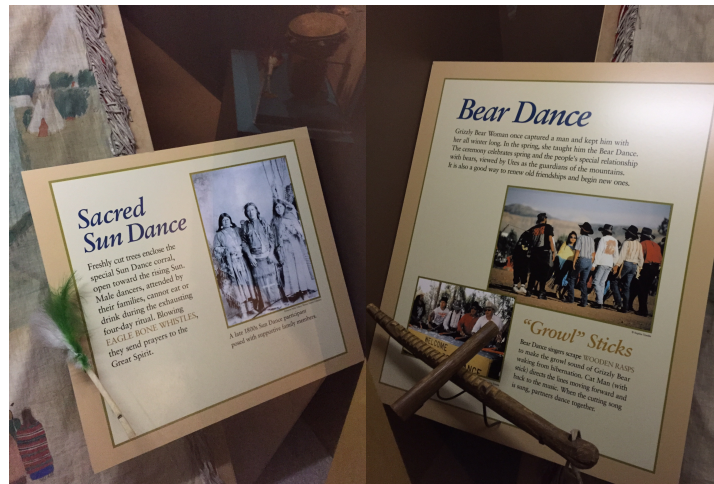


Figure 23

Figure 24

A tableta, or special ceremonial headdress (Figure 22), and dance rattle are presented as examples of Zuni ceremonial life. The tableta is affixed to a Plexiglas rendering of a face with drawn on features. The rattle sits below the tableta, placed at a forty-five degree angle. A label to the right of the objects explains the purpose of the tableta as a dance headdress. Ute ceremonial life is represented by displays of a “growl” stick and eagle-bone whistle (Figure 23 and 24). Topical labels explain their use in the Bear Dance and Sun Dance respectively, explaining the ritual procedures and meaning.



Figure 25



Figure 26

A display of Cherokee objects includes five masks (Figure 25) used for social and religious purposes. A label titled, “Strong in Magic,” explains that “booger” dancers use masks depicting foreigners in plays that poke fun at elders and relieve community tension. The other two labels describe the continuity of mask carving traditions and how healers believe masked dances aid patient healing. Clothing worn for the Seminole Green Corn Dance (Figure 26) is hung from steel poles on padded wire hangers. A dance rattle is affixed to the topic label on the back wall of the display and a turtle shell rattle is mounted on a steel pole in front of the clothing. The use of the rattle is described in the label, but there is no description of the brightly colored clothing. The displays of dance objects described above do not have individual labels, but photographs in topic labels and displays that mimic the “natural surroundings” of the object provide the visitor with an understanding of the objects’ context.

[illegible]

The objects displayed in “Welcome to the Potlatch” are almost all dance objects—covering a wide range of expressive traditions from music to textiles to dance and song—each object is given attention and description through labels, quotations and media. In the center of the display is a video, with a caption below the screen that identifies the footage as part of a repatriation ceremony. Music is tied to the video, looping every few minutes throughout the space as the video restarts.



Figure 28

Facing the exhibit, the left side of the display (Figure 28), features a tiered display of a button blanket and killer whale mask with corresponding topic labels (Figure 28). The labels identify the origin and date of the objects and provide a brief overview of their use. This approach mirrors the other dance object displays, but the label describing the mask utilizes a quote from an Indigenous mask carver. The quote, by Kwakwaka'wakw artist Richard Hunt, states: "Whenever I carve something like the killer whale mask, I feel I am reclaiming the rights to this dance for the Kwakiutl people, and when I dance the killer whale mask I feel I am taking on the spirit of the killer whale. Our elders say that the killer whale possesses the spirit of our great chiefs."

In addition to the quotation above, there are four more quotations from Native individuals present in "Welcome to the Potlatch." The header label consists of a quote

from Ki-Ke-in, a Nuu-chah-nulth tribal member who states, “When we sing our songs, when we show our masks and headdresses, we invoke the presence of our ancestors. We are collapsing time.” To the far right side of the display, inset with a picture of a dancer in mid-leap, Ken McNeil, who identifies as Tahitian, Tlingit and Nissg’aa, describes his process: “The key to every mask is to give it life. You have to see the piece breathe, you have to feel it is alive.”

A pink panel extends along the bottom of the display, informing visitors about the different types of masks and their association to other creative expressions such as song and stories and their use in ceremonial life. Emmett Oliver, Quinault, explains the value of song to the potlatch and the role of the singer in the ceremony: “A lot of things took place in a potlatch...songs were given away...The song, or even a story or a legend, became personal and no one else could sing it or tell it. It was protected, like a copyright.” Finally, the video concludes with a quote by Mark Jacobs Jr. of the Tlingit tribe, “Objects restored to us mean our culture is not dying, it is still alive.”



Figure 29



Figure 30

On the right side of the display, a Dog dance mask and regalia (Figure 29) are displayed on a plastic mannequin. The label explains the ritual the outfit is associated with, the material composition of the bodysuit and the manner in which the museum acquired it. On the platform beneath the Dog dance regalia is a Wolf and Eagle Mask (Figure 30). The label in front of the mask conveys its title, group origin and date, followed by a brief, sentence long description that reveals that the mask can transform, opening to show an eagle beak and feather headdress. To the left of the mask platform, on the right side of the main bottom panel, text explains that the Wolf and Eagle mask and dance represent the concept of changing from one state of being to another. The text concludes by explaining that dancers imitate the movements of animals and other beings and transform into other beings by manipulating the masks with strings.

Directly behind the Wolf and Eagle mask, the Weather Headdress mask (also Figure 30) is mounted to the cedar wall in profile. Its label informs the visitor that masks can be used to represent mythical beings that manifest as natural phenomena, such as earthquakes, volcanoes and thunder. Above the Weather Headdress mask is an Echo mask, whose mouthpieces are interchangeable dependent on the character or part of the story being performed. The label clarifies that echo comes from a technique where singers throw their voices so that they seem to come from the masked dancer. This exhibit of Northwest Coast objects, a collection of three glass cases, is a replicated model of a nineteenth century chief's house in Alert Bay, British Columbia. The objects are framed by or affixed to cedar surroundings and visitors enter through a brightly painted doorway into a room with a pitched cedar ceiling.

The second display that features a diversity of approaches is titled, “Hopi Life on the Three Mesas” (Figure 31). The display features different categories of Hopi expressive culture: weaving, pottery, silversmithing, and dance. Each category has its own topic label, but the largest, most prominent label discusses the Hopi Rainbow dance. The display includes an array of Rainbow dance objects—kilt and rain sash, tableta, and rattle—and a painting by Otis Polelonema depicting a community performing the Rainbow dance. The label explains the meaning of the Rainbow dance and outlines the different costumes dancers wear during the ceremony. The label narrates the painting, explaining the different symbols and the role of each type of dancer. Each dance object is identified and explained in the context of the painting.



Figure 31

Exhibit Organization

Svasek (2007) argues that natural history museums treat objects as works of culture and these objects, “frequently appear in textual and material settings, with elaborate labels, surrounded by other objects, or as part of a life group” (141). Denver Museum of Nature and Science engages in this practice, organizing their exhibit geographically and featuring reconstructions of dwellings and dioramas to help visitors place the objects in their original context. For example, the Jemez Pueblo case is designed to mimic an adobe structure with windows the visitor looks through to see the objects within. “Welcome to the Potlatch” is located within a reconstructed nineteenth century longhouse.

Museum anthropologists warn that the underlying message of conventional ethnographic artifact displays is that they are hard to understand and lack the instant aesthetic power of art (Svasek 2007). But constructivist theorists argue that environmental context is key to enhancing visitor engagement and understanding. Hein (1998), Edson and Dean (1994) encourage museum exhibits to appeal to familiar elements to trigger recognition and orientation. Monti and Keene (2013) identify connections to the familiar as key to visitor interest and understanding, arguing that contextual elements can help orient the visitor to the space and promote more meaningful connections with other cultures. Howes (2005) suggests that by creating these contextual environments museums are allowing for a more sensuous relationship between the body and the exhibits. From this perspective, constructed environments are key to improving visitor understanding of the multisensory dimension of dance objects.

Crane Hall has a clear direction of exploration or visitor flow and includes an introductory room where Native people greet you in their languages. These spaces serve to orient the visitor to the layout and organization of the space, which is key to better visitor engagement and understanding (Hein 1998). The welcome message also includes Native voice, including contemporary Native people in the display of their culture and communicating the diversity and dynamism of the cultures exhibited, both key to combatting past exclusion of Indigenous perspectives in museum displays (Clifford 1991; Phillips 2006).

The displays are organized around a meandering circular path, with rooms and inlets styled to represent tribal regions or cultures. For most of the displays, bright or earthy paint tones are utilized as backdrops and the lighting is soft and muted. The design of the exhibit provides the visitor with an understanding of the objects' environment, while the lighting creates a more intimate experience (Kratz 2011). As Monti and Keene (2013) state, dim lighting requires visitors to lean in and peer into the displays, better capturing their curiosity and attention (252).

Constructing elaborate environments for museum objects can be problematic. In the past, dioramas and constructed environments were used to reinforce ideas of an "ethnographic present" that froze Indigenous culture into a timeless "day before" acculturation status (Fowler and Fowler 1996: 130). Crane Hall is dominated by its large dioramas. The dioramas show scenes featuring clothed mannequins in front of painted mural landscapes. Lonetree (2012) argues that dioramas contradict contemporary Indigenous narratives because they were historically utilized to show Native culture as a

thing of the past or part of the natural landscape. While Hill (2000) argues that the dioramas in Crane Hall are notable for their attempts to display Native groups in plausible situations with realistic facial expressions, he argues that they keep Indians frozen in time, exhibited in the same fashion as flora and fauna next door (40). I believe the dioramas could be utilized in the exhibit's messages of diversity and continuance if they were updated to reflect contemporary Native life, like the reconstructed arbor scene at Sam Noble, which shows modern amenities and the use of objects in contemporary Native life. Alternatively, the labels for the dioramas could be amended to make clear the time period and context of the scene depicted.

Exhibit Narrative

Denver Museum of Nature and Science is unique to my case studies in its inclusion of Native voice. The exclusion of artist narratives has been detrimental to object display, especially for dance objects as their meaning is dependent on the dancer's actions (Mitchell 2006). Native voice is key to Indigenous curatorial approaches, but it is especially important in non-Native institutions that primarily cater to non-Native audiences. As Price (1989) states,

If we wish to tune in to the aesthetic frameworks of other cultures, we need to make a special effort to push aside our everyday understandings of how art is talked or written about...Often this means softening the distinction between artist and critic and paying closer attention to what the art producers themselves have to say (131).

The use of Native voice in dance object displays at Denver Museum of Nature and Science also encourages Indigenous communities to participate in their representation,

creating an environment for cross cultural understanding, crucial steps in the decolonization of museum practices (Kreps 2003).

In addition to their use of Native voice, several display narratives address larger issues of representation through reflexive analysis. In “Welcome to the Potlatch,” individual artists and owners of culture are identified and reflected in display text, connecting visitors to the personal dimension of the objects through spiritual and familial descriptions. Labels and display text in “Welcome to the Potlatch” utilize Native voice, returning the agency of representation back to the host community (Clifford 1991). The label for the Dog dance regalia even discusses how and when the museum acquired the object, providing visitors with rare insight into collecting and acquisition practices, which Fowler and Fowler (1996) identify as key to the representation of Indigenous cultures. In the Southwest section, an empty object mount has a label that explains that the object, which is depicted in a painting in the case, has been removed in compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990).

In addition, the video and label in “Welcome to the Potlatch” address repatriation, reflexively acknowledging past inappropriate collection and display practices and stating their current commitment to collaboration and consultation with American Indian communities. The concluding quote of the video by Mark Jacobs Jr. addresses how objects are a source of continuance for Native communities. Addressing these issues directly in exhibit displays shows the museum’s commitment to transparency and accountability to Native communities and their visitors, which Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, curator of anthropology at Denver Museum of Nature and Science,

identified as key to creating and maintaining productive relationships between tribal communities and museums (Lecture, February 27th, 2014).

Representational Strategies: Multisensory Elements

Visual representation is again dominant in Crane Hall, despite the prevalence of dance objects on display. The label for the Jemez Pueblo dance kilt features a photograph and drawn diagrams of dancers wearing the kilt. Displays for Pascu Yaqui Easter Ceremony regalia, Zuni Ceremonial Life, Ute Ceremonial Life and Seminole Green Corn Dance have dance objects that produce sound with no audio elements. The Hopi Rainbow dance display is anchored by a painting—which is noteworthy because the artist is recognized and it provides contextual information on the objects’ use to the festival—but the painting is dated 1934, which is problematic in describing a contemporary cultural expression.

With the exception of the Pascu Yaqui Easter Ceremony and the Dog dance regalia, dance objects are displayed with no mannequins or attempts to arrange dance objects in terms of the body. The separation between body and object continues to hinder dance object interpretation as it provides the visitor with no clues to its use in the dance (Feldman 2006; Bouttiaux 2012). The film in “Welcome to the Potlatch” does provide a glimpse of how dance regalia is worn and performed, and includes an audio track, but this is the sole example of media being utilized in dance object displays in Crane Hall. Without any multisensory elements, the visitor is blind to the multisensory nature of the other dance objects on display (Drewal 2012). Despite their success in utilizing Native

voice and reflexive analysis in their interpretive materials, the dance object displays at Denver Museum of Nature and Science continue to perpetuate static display techniques contrary to the revisions recommended by new museum theory.

Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, Norman, Oklahoma



Figure 32—Sam Noble Museum of Oklahoma Natural History, associated with the University of Oklahoma, has granted permission for the use of images in this document. All images originate from the McCasland Foundation *Hall of the People of Oklahoma*, and, with the exception of Figure 32, come from the section, “Today, Tribes of Oklahoma.”

The American Indian collection is displayed in the McCasland Foundation *Hall of the People of Oklahoma*, on the eastern wing of the second floor of the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History. As the title might suggest, the objects displayed come from prehistoric settlements and tribes removed to Oklahoma Territory in the early nineteenth century. The exhibit is arranged chronologically, tracing the history of Indigenous settlement in Oklahoma from the Clovis period to present day. The exhibit narrative is a

combination of archaeological interpretations and tribal oral tradition and origin stories, created in collaboration with Native communities. The introduction panel states, “Members of Native tribal groups, museum professionals and scientists developed the stories told in this gallery.”

The focus of my analysis is the gallery, “Today, Tribes of Oklahoma,” the present day section of the exhibit. The first exhibit element is a timeline titled, “Change over Time,” which defines and describes powwows as “a new form of activity that brings together many tribes for dancing, enjoying traditional foods, buying and selling arts and craft work, and making and renewing friendships.” While the label acknowledges the role of powwows in contemporary Native society, there are no examples of powwow objects in “Today” and there is no video footage or photographs of powwow events.

The second display entitled, “The Road to Our Church,” shows a Cheyenne whistle and Kiowa rattle and fan (Figure 33 and 34). Each object in the display is numbered, and visitors are encouraged to read the corresponding information for the number on the label. The label provides information on the type, material composition, owner or tribal group and date.



Figure 33

Figure 34

The third display, “Collections from the Museum,” shows the diversity of objects in the museum’s collection (Figure 35 and 36). Primarily moccasins, clothing and jewelry, each item in the glass case has a small orange label with the type, material composition, region and date printed on it. The items are arranged systematically, with moccasins, clothing and jewelry placed together. Footwear is stuffed with tissue paper and placed on wooden angled shelves that are mounted to the back wall of the case. Clothing is attached to cloth busts and mounted to the back wall. Jewelry is placed on angled wooden shelves near the bottom of the case. This case has a motion sensor that the visitor triggers to turn on the lights. A light sensor is a popular conservation method for objects of organic composition, as they are sensitive to continuous light and temperature fluctuations (Ogden 2004).



Figure 35



Figure 36

The fourth exhibit, “100 Years Under the Arbor,” features a reconstruction of a modern arbor, which is used by contemporary tribal communities for outdoor domestic life and activities during the summer. An old television and radio plays static, creating the illusion of habitation. A plastic barrier extends floor-to-ceiling such that visitors are not able to interact with the objects, but a picnic table extends part way out of the exhibit allowing visitors the opportunity to sit and look at the objects displayed. The majority of objects are of a domestic nature, but in the back right-hand corner a dance bustle hangs on one of the willow supports.

A label (Figure 37) attached to the picnic table contains a map of numbered objects and a key (Figure 38), which provides descriptions of the object. The dance bustle and baby swing/hammock include a courtesy message. It identifies and thanks the owners who lend the objects when they are not in use.

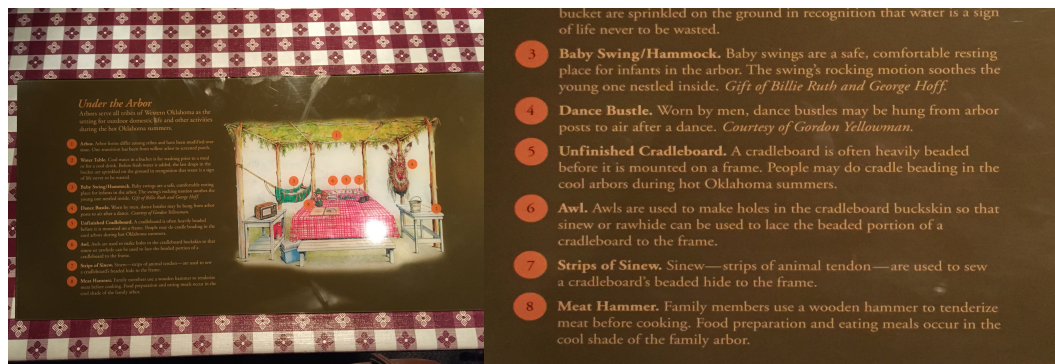


Figure 37

Figure 38

The final gallery space in the *Hall of the Peoples of Oklahoma* consists of two glass cases containing clothing, jewelry and regalia from Oklahoma tribes. The cases feature dance objects—the first a skirt, blouse and leg rattles (Figure 39), the other a shawl and women’s moccasins (Figure 40). These cases are located on the far back wall of the

exhibition; they are the last cases the visitor sees before leaving the gallery. The glass cases are large, enclosed spaces with temperature and humidity monitors and lights in the top of the cases. The clothing is stitched to cloth mannequins with painted metal supports. The moccasins are stuffed with tissue paper and angled towards the viewer, showing off the beaded design on the top of the shoe. The leg rattles are placed in front of the mannequin and are propped up by brass mounts angled toward the viewer.



Figure 39



Figure 40

The blouse, skirt and rattles are dated to the 1960s; the shawl dates to the mid-twentieth century and the moccasins are identified as circa 1920. Each case has a label that identifies the objects in the cases and lists the tribal group and attributed date. Below this information are one to two sentences about the use of the object for a specific dance or ritual. The description for the skirt and blouse identifies the outfit's donor and describes the style as more modern, beginning in the 1920s. The leg rattle description

explains their use as musical accompaniment during the Stomp Dance. The label acknowledges that the use of milk bottles is an adaption from earlier versions that used tortoise shells. The shawl is defined by its use during ceremonial and social dances and its function as a gift to women and young girls. I'n-Lon-Schka dancers wear the moccasins during the festival held each June in Oklahoma and the beaded design is identified as unique to the Osage.

In the *Hall of the People of Oklahoma*, there are several “learning stations” where visitors can learn more about elements of the exhibit (Figure 41). For example, in the Mississippian period area there is a learning area that contains a binder titled, “Hand Print Day,” with information about the creation of the exhibit’s façade—a stucco entrance with tribal members handprints.



Figure 41

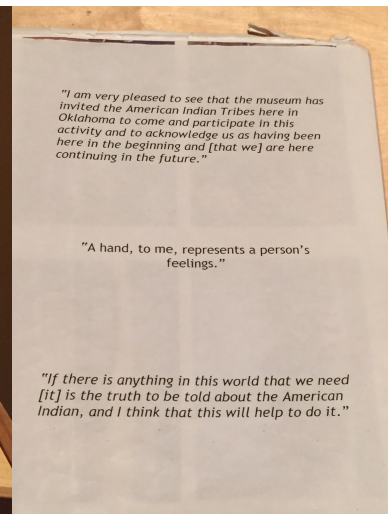


Figure 42

The binder explains the process of collaboration with tribal communities and describes the creation of the façade as a representation of that process. The binder (Figure 42) also includes newspaper clippings and excerpts from tribal newsletters where

Native and non-Native people expressed their opinion of the exhibit when it first opened in 2000. The station does not provide the names of those who commented, but it does provide a bound book with a key to the handprints, showing those tribal members who participated in Handprint Day.

Exhibit Organization

The *Hall of the People of Oklahoma* focuses on one region and is arranged chronologically with the intent of showing how Native groups and their culture have evolved from past to present (Sam Noble 2015). The use of chronological configuration is an interesting case study for the presentation of Native American culture. In the past, chronological arrangement was utilized to reinforce evolutionary notions of cultural progression, with Indigenous artifacts representing the low end of the spectrum (Buchli 2002). But as Svasek (2007) advocates, “Context should not be thought of as a static, secure box in which supposedly unproblematic categories of art are kept, but as a setting that is liable to change and that requires extensive social and historical knowledge...” (6). Acknowledging and reflecting contemporary theory on the interpretation and display of Indigenous culture, the exhibit changes its display approach with each time period. Rather than a reinforcement of past stereotypical representation, the changing of the display environments from the highly contextual displays utilized in prehistoric area to the starkly modern space of “Today, Tribes of Oklahoma” where ethnological objects are displayed, could communicate a message of progress and endurance.

The organization of “Today” reflects a formal, aesthetic approach, providing an interesting counter to the more conventional natural history approach of contextualism utilized at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Display cases are spread out throughout the exhibit providing ample room for visitors to walk amongst the cases. As the visitor enters “Today,” the space opens up and labels becoming smaller with less text. Objects are displayed in glass cases with neutral colored backgrounds. Small basic identification labels describe the title, date and cultural affiliation of the object displayed. The one exception to the aesthetic approach is the reconstructed arbor. Large labels and an abundance of color distinguish the reconstructed arbor from the other displays. As I discussed in my analysis of Denver Art Museum, the aesthetic approach has some drawbacks. But the aesthetic approach at Sam Noble is illustrative of the progression of museum approaches to Indigenous culture, beginning with the highly contextual prehistoric and historic displays and ending with the aesthetic approach to the ethnology collection. The different approaches demonstrate that Indigenous objects can be both art and artifact and counters the notion that Indigenous culture is extinct or static by illustrating their continued presence in the region.

Exhibit Narrative

The introductory label to the Hall of Peoples of Oklahoma states that the exhibit was created in consultation and collaboration with leaders of Native communities. Despite the collaborative spirit of the introductory label, Native voice is not overtly present in dance object labels in “Today.” Instead, Native voice is present the summary

of the exhibit development process on the discovery cart and the acknowledgement of cultural and personal ownership of the dance objects on display.

The binder on the discovery cart includes the perspectives of Native community members and their input on the collaborative process and exhibit narrative. One tribal member expressed: “I am pleased that the museum felt that it was important to have representatives of the Native community...They’ve listened to what we have to say, they’ve listened to our comments on wording and perspective, and I think it is very important that the Native viewpoint was given and listened to, and that we are able to be a part of this.”

Bouttiaux (2012) identifies two methods for contradicting past stereotypes: contextualize works used in the past by peoples still present and ritually active and demonstrate the continuous dynamism of the people erroneously placed in a static environment (36). By including the perspectives of Native communities in the development of the exhibit and informing visitors of their role in the exhibit process through the discovery cart, curators are communicating that these peoples are still present and active in Oklahoma communities. As another Native community member stated: “I am very pleased to see that the museum has invited the American Indian tribes here in Oklahoma to come and participate in this activity and to acknowledge us as having been here in the beginning and [that we] are here continuing in the future.”

Native voice is also invaluable to object interpretation, providing insight not available by simply looking at the object. As Ting (2010) argues, “By encouraging community groups to share their personal thoughts and aesthetic imaginations with other

visitors, the museum tries to enhance visitor dialogues with objects to be more personal, relevant and vigorous,” key to greater visitor understanding of the objects displayed (200). The personal, contextual information provided in the label for Osage Women’s Moccasins, describing how the design is unique to the tribe and its use during a specific festival, is far more engaging and illuminating than the basic identification information provided for Woman’s Moccasins in “Collections from the Museum.” By including Native voice in exhibit narratives, the museum is able to acknowledge objects’ continued use in traditions and customs—as discussed in the Women’s Moccasins label—and provides a social history of the objects displayed. The gathering of interpretive information can also reinforce the collaborative relationship between museums and the community, which Phillips (2006) argues should be the goal of contemporary museum work with Indigenous cultures.

Identifying and acknowledging individual ownership is another step towards more representationally appropriate displays. It reiterates that Native culture is contemporary and enduring and transfers agency to Native communities and individuals (Clifford 1991; Price 1988). In the map key of the arbor, individual owners are referenced or thanked for their contributions. The label for “Skirt and Blouse” references Loraine Leitka as the creator of the outfit as well as the purpose of its creation. As I observed at Denver Art Museum, maintaining collaborative relationships with Native communities can lead to more in depth contextual and provenance information and can lead to better relationships with Native communities.

Including Native perspectives in the development of exhibit narrative identifies Native advisors as the experts and agents of their own narrative, addressing historical inequity of past approaches to Indigenous representation (Lindauer 2007; Colwell-Chanthaphonh Lecture 2014). But Native voice is absent from the interpretive text of “Today” and discussion of the collaboration process is restricted to brief mention in the introductory label and the discovery cart binder. To better reflect the influence of community collaboration on their approach to contemporary Indigenous objects, the use of Native voice must be extended to exhibit text.

Representational Strategies: Multisensory Elements

Multisensory interpretation and display are excluded from visual representation in “Today.” Displays feature leg rattles and whistles with no audio or descriptive language to convey their multisensory dimension to museum visitors. The inclusion of a television and radio in the reconstructed arbor could add a multisensory dimension to the display, but the radio and television do not provide additional visual or auditory stimuli and the dated appliances complicate narratives of continuance. In theory, the reconstructed arbor could be a vehicle for greater visitor understanding, as it provides visitors with the environment in which these objects are utilized in contemporary Native culture (Hein 1998; Monti and Keene 2013). But the arbor is a missed opportunity as it does not educate visitors about contemporary Native culture or include Native voice in the exhibit text for the objects on display.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

African objects were made to belong to a broader realm of experience. If we take them out of the dark, still their movement, quiet the music, and strip them of additions, we make them accessible to our visual culture, but we render them unrecognizable or meaningless... (Vogel 1988: 11).

Review of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategies utilized in dance object interpretation and display to discover if their multisensory nature was acknowledged and investigate the influence of theory from material culture, critical museology and museum education. Approaches to the interpretation and display of Indigenous and non-Western objects have seen significant growth in the acknowledgement of the multisensory dimension, so Indigenous and non-Western dance objects served as the focus of my examination. To explore the influence of theory on the interpretation and display of Indigenous and non-Western dance objects, I investigated the extent to which Native voice, reflexive analysis and multisensory elements were present at four case study institutions—Denver Art Museum, Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma and the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Norman, Oklahoma.

Hooper-Greenhill (2000) states, “In the post-museum, histories that have been hidden away are being brought to light, and in this, modernist master narratives are being challenged” (145). Museum anthropologists and critical museologists utilize reflexive

analysis to reveal institutional biases and assumptions and redress past wrongs in regards to representation (Ames 1992). Including perspectives from the represented group is also important. Native voice aids in visitor understanding of the objects, democratizing museum practice and furthering its commitment to fostering a constructive learning environment (Alivizatou 2012). The final element I explored was the presence of multisensory elements in the display of dance objects. The continued dominance of visual representation methods hinders progress in the development of more diverse strategies for dance object displays. And for multisensory objects like dance objects, multisensory analysis is key in their interpretation and display (Dudley 2010; Mitchell 2006). Table 1 provides an overview of my research findings.

	Native Voice	Reflexive Analysis	Multisensory Elements
Denver Art Museum	✓	✓	✓
Thomas Gilcrease Institute	?	✗	?
Denver Museum of Nature and Science	✓	✓	?
Sam Noble Museum	✓	?	✗

Table 1—In the table above, a checkmark delineates clear evidence of the element discussed. A question mark represents uncertainty as to the presence or absence of the element, while an X designates the absence of the element within the displays.

Shannon (2009) argues that Native voice is not only the inclusion of perspectives from Native communities, but consultation and collaboration throughout the development of an exhibit. So while Native voice is not evident in exhibit text at the Denver Art Museum, it is present in the organization of the exhibits. The American Indian galleries were renovated in 2010 to reflect input from a decade of sessions with Native community members (Hill 2000). While the renovation made significant strides in exhibit organization—such as the removal of glass cases and greater incorporation of contemporary and historical works—as well as the development of new provocative themes, Native perspectives remain primarily behind the scenes in dance object display.

There are many examples of reflexive analysis at Denver Art Museum. The topic label “Potlatch and Privilege” and the film in the Northwest Coast mask exhibit discuss the issues of authenticity and clan ownership. Several identification labels name the individual artist, which Clifford (1991) and Errington (2005) argue is key to combatting authoritative voice and returning agency to groups historically misrepresented in museums (Clifford 1991; Errington 2005). Curators acknowledge the process of object transition and the limitations to multisensory object interpretation and display in the introductory label for the Egungun mask. The location of the African, Oceanic and American Indian galleries also reflects self-knowledge about the influence of separate exhibit spaces on visitor perceptions of Western and non-Western art.

Denver Art Museum had the most instances of multisensory elements in their display of dance objects. Expressive language was utilized in the introductory label for the Egungun mask, the label “Magic in the Firelight” in the American Indian gallery and

the label for the Yurok dance skirt, revealing their multisensory dimension. The Egungun mask display also feature a rotating mannequin, an interactive music station that played music throughout the gallery and a bench area with individual music players and headphones for visitors to listen to more selections of African music.

Native voice is limited to the film *Into the Circle* at the Gilcrease Museum. The film features Native dancers discussing the role of powwows in contemporary Native life, but it is out of place next to historical examples of Plains' horse regalia. Reflexive analysis is scarce as well, the introductory label to *Enduring Spirit* claims the theme of the exhibition is continuance and endurance, themes that reflect an understanding of contemporary approaches to Indigenous material culture, but these themes are not addressed in any other interpretive text in the exhibition. *Into the Circle* and a hands-on touch panel beneath the moccasin display serve as the only multisensory elements at the Gilcrease, although the use of photographs in the *Mexican Masks* display does provide an image of the masks in their performed context.

Dance object displays at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science contain the most instances of Native voice of my case study institutions. As visitors enter the gallery there is an orientation room where Native individuals greet you in their respective language. In addition, there are five quotes from Native artists in the display "Welcome to the Potlatch." There are also several instances of reflexive analysis in Crane Hall. In "Welcome to the Potlatch," individual artists are all identified. The label for the Dog dance regalia references its previous owner. An empty mount in a case in the Southwest section and the text below the film in "Welcome to the Potlatch" discuss the influence of

NAGPRA and repatriation on contemporary museum approaches to Indigenous material culture. Multisensory elements, however, are limited to the film and audio in “Welcome to the Potlatch.”

Like Denver Art Museum, Native voice at Sam Noble is not present in the interpretive text, but is present in the discussion of the collaboration process at the discovery cart and the exhibit’s treatment of ownership. Acknowledging individual ownership of dance objects is also evidence of reflexive analysis, restoring agency to Native artists and communities. The chronological arrangement of the exhibit shows the progression of approaches to Indigenous material culture, communicating the complex history and continued influence of Native communities on the region. There are no examples of multisensory elements in dance object display at Sam Noble. The arbor contains a television and a radio, but neither play video or audio.

In the reduction of authoritative voice and the use of reflexive analysis, all four case study institutions require further progress. The historic nature of all four collections could be addressed with reflexive acknowledgement in exhibit labels and a clear message of continued tradition or innovation must be communicated in the display of Indigenous and non-Western objects. The representational strategies for dance objects at my case study institutions were quite limited. Denver Art Museum and Denver Museum of Nature and Science both include audio in one of their dance object displays, but exclude it from all others. The Gilcrease had one opportunity for visitors to tactilely engage with dance objects, but it provides visitors with no clue to the object’s meaning. The rest of the display strategies are visual, and for dynamic objects dance objects these strategies

are not evocative enough to communicate the multisensory nature of dance objects to museum visitors. The use of multisensory elements in dance object display conveys the performative nature of the objects, but at present, multisensory elements are few and far between at my case study institutions.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could explore a variety of different directions. While this project focused on the representation of dance objects in mainstream museums, research and analysis of dance object display strategies could be carried out at a small, community-based cultural centers and tribal museums, where the opinions of museum staff, local participants and audience members could be more comprehensively collected and reviewed. Lonetree (2012) argues that often strategies at tribal museums do not diverge from approaches at mainstream museums, but future research could confirm or deny her assertions in regards to dance objects.

Kurin (1997) acknowledges the strides community and culturally specific museums have made, but he argues that this does not release mainstream museums from their responsibilities, as community members are not allocated enough money to be competitive. He suggests instead that community museums collaborate with mainstream museums to create a series of traveling exhibitions that reflect their perspectives on different issues of representation (Ibid., 106). Future research could focus on such collaborations, providing a framework for collaborative efforts and more displays that include source community perspectives.

A comparative analysis of the display strategies employed by museums with larger versus smaller budgets could be beneficial in examining the challenges inherent in dance object display. As Hendon (1979) states, “The major difference between museums is not, therefore, in its policy questions or even its goals and aspirations; rather, the difference is a matter of scale. The questions may be the same but, because of scale differences, the answers seldom are” (18). Therefore an analysis of the influence of budget on dance object displays would be helpful, especially since multimedia display elements and live performance events are expensive.

The use of live performance to supplement museum displays has been suggested as a worthy alternative to film and photography. Live performance has proved successful at The Performance Gallery at Brighton Museum and Art Gallery—where visitors are allowed to perform replicas of the masks on display— and at the National Museum of the American Indian, New York where visitors are invited to a biannual dance exhibition and can sign up for workshops with Native dancers to better understand the dance objects on display (Savage 2008; J. Gorelick, Personal Communication 2014).

Approaches that encourage visitor participation have been shown to influence visitor understanding. As constructivist museum theorists identify visitors as active agents in object interpretation and display, visitor interaction and participation has become key to contemporary museum practice. In Nina Simon’s (2010) book “The Participatory Museum,” she suggests that cultural institutions can reconnect with their public and demonstrate their value and relevance to contemporary life by “inviting people to actively engage as cultural participants, not passive consumers” (1). Museums have

responded by developing educational programming and events that help create connections between institutions and their communities. In the case of the Denver Art Museum, the Artist-in-Residence Program and the Annual Friendship Powwow are programs that feature visitor participation. At the National Museum of the American Indian, interactive displays and annual dance socials and summer camps supplement the display of American Indian dance. In both these cases, visitor participation is an important part of the visitor experience, positively affecting visitor understanding of dance objects.

As I addressed in my limitations section in Chapter Three, visitor evaluation is often a component of exhibit analysis. Formal surveys and other visitor evaluation methods—such as measuring the amount of time visitors spent at a specific display—could be conducted, providing the researcher with quantitative data on a dance object display’s popularity and/or visitor understanding of the exhibition. This approach would be beneficial in the investigation of the effectiveness of current display strategies and the development of more successful methods for dance object interpretation and display.

Finally, dance object interpretation and display could be useful in the discussion of how best to exhibit intangible cultural heritage such as dance. Examining approaches to dance object displays could serve as an important step in determining how to conserve and promote intangible cultural heritage, a mission of great importance to the museum world as it is the stated goal of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003).

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